

# JIMMY AT HAPPY HOUSE

JOSEPH CHASE



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"YOU AND JOHN ARE DANDY SWIMMERS,"  
PRAISED NELSON



# JIMMY AT HAPPY HOUSE

BY

JOSEPH CHASE

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## Introduction

The Three J's, Jimmy, John and Junior, plan a surprise for their parents and from their gardens gather sufficient vegetables to give a Jimmy-John Dinner. Junior's contribution is a solitary beet. Mr. Hopkins, in return, surprises them with an "August Tree," which serves the same purpose as a Christmas tree and creates just as much excitement.

Jimmy and John develop their baseball team and win a game from larger boys, and in so doing gain the friendship of a very fine man. Following the baseball season comes the great "circus" and the Three J's prove as able to conduct this amusing affair as to produce good vegetables, a crack ball team, and many interesting expeditions to their cave and to the lake.





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# Jimmy at Happy House

## CHAPTER I

### A HAPPY HOUSE HOLIDAY

“HERE, Doodle, Doo-dle, Do-o-d-le! Come, Doo-d-le!” Junior Hopkins’ coaxing call for Doodle ended in a high squeal. Doodle was Junior’s pet rooster. Just then he was paying no attention to his little owner. Junior had not brought Doodle anything to eat, so Doodle went on strutting around the chicken park as though he had neither seen nor heard.

“Come along, Junie,” beckoned John from across the lawn. John had just brought the Hopkins’ car to a standstill on the drive. “Never mind Doodle. First thing you know you’ll stub your foot and down you’ll go, and get your nice white suit all dirt. Then you can’t go in the car to meet Father.”

“I are not goin’ to fall down,” Junior called out emphatically. “Doodle don’t come near me ’cause I don’t give him some cake. Good-bye, old pig Doodle. I don’t like you much.” Junior turned and marched grandly to the chicken yard gate. Doodle saw that he was going away and took a few sidling steps after the little boy. It was too late. Junior closed the gate with a sharp click and started for the car without looking back.

“Oh, there you are, Junie!” Mrs. Hopkins came out on the veranda. She looked very charming in a soft white silk afternoon gown. She appeared relieved at the sight of Junior, still spick and span. “We have only time enough to drive to the station before Father’s train is due. Where is Jimmy?” she asked John.

“Right behind you.” Jimmy came out the front door as she spoke. “You’d better sit beside me, Mother, to see that I drive just exactly right. You can drive *most* as well as Father.” Very gallantly he helped his pretty golden-haired mother into the front seat of the machine.

“Keep your eye on Junie, John,” Mrs. Hopkins said. “You know how slippery he is. He’s likely to open the door and pitch out, head-first, unless you watch him.”

John had already swung Junior into the tonneau of the machine. Mrs. Hopkins turned in her seat and spoke to Junior. "Remember, Junie, you must sit still and be a good boy."

"I are always a good boy," was Junior's placid reply. "I want to sit on the front seat."

"Well, you can't," John told him decidedly. "Jimmy's going to drive and Mother has to sit by him; so where could you sit?"

"On the front seat." Junior was not dismayed at the situation. "I like it there. Jimmy can sit with you, Johnny. I like to sit by Muvver."

"No, sir," vetoed Jimmy who was in the act of taking the driver's seat. "Some other time, Junie. I'm going to start now. All ready. Now don't talk to me, John, for I can't listen and drive, too."

Jimmy was feeling quite proud of himself. It was the first time he had been allowed to drive the Hopkins' roadster in the street. He was only eleven years old, but he was large for his age, and strong. He had often run the car down the private drive and from the gate to the garage. He had coaxed so hard to be allowed to take the wheel on the short ride to the station that his mother had finally consented to his plea.



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Under Jimmy's careful hands the roadster slid smoothly down the drive, through the open gates and out into the street. The train which was to bring Mr. Hopkins home was due at Lakeview station at five minutes to six. They had ten minutes in which to reach the station.

Mr. Hopkins was a traveling salesman for a large manufacturing house. He was away from his home a good deal of the time. In summer he had a six weeks' vacation. Occasionally he was able to come home through the year for a day or two at a time; sometimes for a week. Only the night before a letter had come from him with the pleasant news that he would be home for a two days' stay. John and Jimmy had been up since daybreak preparing a surprise for him. Even Junior had helped a little with it, but as Jimmy often said: "Junie's more helpful when he keeps out of the way."

Junior was jubilant to think "Favver" was coming home. He sang his joy as he was being lifted into the car, and burst into another of his loud, but tuneless, songs the minute the car had gained the street. "I are goin' to see Favver! I are goin' to see Favver!" he warbled enthusiastically, keeping time to the song with both

feet and hands. Passers-by on the sidewalk smiled at the noisy little golden-haired boy.

"I guess everybody in Lakeview'll know you're going to see Daddy," John told him. John was trying faithfully to keep an eye on frisky Junior and at the same time watch Jimmy drive. He hoped that he would some day soon be allowed to drive the car through the Lakeview streets. He would drive just the way Jimmy was now driving; not any faster; not any slower.

John greatly admired Jimmy though the two brothers did not always agree. Jimmy was stronger and quicker than he was at all outdoor sports. He was taller than John and broader of shoulder. Jimmy was yellow-haired, blue-eyed and well-muscled for a boy of his age. John was slender and dark, but had a good deal of wiry strength. He was a year younger than Jimmy, but up with him in school. After all the two were evenly matched.

"Our surprise will please Daddy as much as the ones he always gives us." John leaned forward and spoke loudly in his mother's ear.

"Of course it will." Mrs. Hopkins nodded and smiled. "I know he will say——" She broke off suddenly with a startled gasp of "Oh,

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my!" An automobile had sped up from behind them and passed their car with a rushing, whirring sound. The other machine had come so close to the roadster the two cars had just missed scraping. Mrs. Hopkins had glimpsed it only enough to see that it was bright blue. It had been going far beyond the proper speeding limit.

"That's the time we most had a smash-up!" shrieked John in excitement. "It wasn't Jimmy's fault, either. He was going along all right."

Jimmy had now turned the car into Center Street, the main street of Lakeview. The blue car had rounded the same corner and disappeared. When they reached the station yard, and Jimmy brought the roadster to a stop on the tree-lined drive behind the station building, he turned in the seat and said soberly: "That blue car almost scraped against the side of ours. I wonder whose car it was?"

"Don't know," John shook his head. "It went by us like a big, bright-blue flash. I couldn't see who was in it. I guess the driver'd be arrested if he drove down Center Street like that."

"I guess he would," Jimmy agreed. "I heard it just as it came up to us. I didn't dare look at



it. I had to keep my eyes on my part of the road."

"You did very well, Jimmy," Mrs. Hopkins said warmly. "You were good and steady as it whizzed by us. I jumped in the seat a little. It slid past us so suddenly and so close. It startled me."

Jimmy flushed and looked pleased at his mother's praise. "I'm glad it missed us," he returned. "A smashed car wouldn't have been a very good surprise for Father, with maybe some of us hurt. There's a train whistling. That's Father's. Maybe we'd better go out on the platform. It'll be here in a minute or two." Jimmy liked to play man of the family during his father's absence.

"See, Junie." A moment later the little group were on the platform. John pointed down the lengths of shining steel rails. "There's the train!"

"Woo, wooo, woo!" Junior tried to imitate the whistle of the fast approaching train.

"Now watch all along the car steps for Father," John continued.

"I can see him before anyone can," Junior declared confidently. "*There* are Favver!

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Hoo-rah!" He gave a joyful little cheer, broke from John's detaining hand and started up the platform, full tilt. Surely enough, Mr. Hopkins was just leaving the train when Junior spied him.

"Welcome to our city!" John cried, catching his father about the waist and giving him a good hug. "We're so happy that you could come home. Happy House is happier'n ever."

Mr. Hopkins had already swung Junior into his arms. The little boy was laughing and crowing in high glee. Even Jimmy, forgetful of his late dignity, joined in the triangular embrace. The three Js towed their father triumphantly toward Mrs. Hopkins as she advanced to meet them.

"It's a good thing you are coming home again week after next," John declared as they all started for the automobile. "Jimmy and I have such a lot to tell you we couldn't think of it all in only two days."

"*You don't say so!*" Mr. Hopkins pretended deep surprise. His brown eyes were twinkling.

"Yes, we do say so," mimicked John with a little snicker.

"Better begin right this minute then," Mr.

Hopkins advised. "I don't want to miss anything."

"You won't. You just wait and see. That's what you always say to us. This time——" John checked himself. He and Jimmy had agreed that they would not even let their father know they had a surprise for him until he was fairly in the house and had seen part of it.

"This time—what?" was the hopeful question. Mr. Hopkins purposely imitated John's tones when he was especially curious about something.

John and Jimmy both laughed. They could not help it. Mrs. Hopkins smiled. Junior chuckled, too, because he saw the others laughing and felt happy.

"I sha'n't say another single word." John closed his lips tightly and looked very mysterious.

"You hadn't better," Jimmy warned. "You almost told something."

"I see I'm the victim of a plot." Mr. Hopkins raised his heavy eyebrows, drew down the corners of his mouth and looked anxious. "Well, I'll have to make the best of it. Is Junior in the plot, too? And may I please ask who is going



to drive the car to that hap, happier, happiest-hap called Happy House? ”

“ Mother said I might if you didn’t care,” was Jimmy’s prompt answer.

“ All right. I’ll sit beside you and see what you can do. If I like your driving, I may some day hire you as my chauffeur.”

Jimmy giggled as he took the driver’s seat. His father had already helped his mother and Junior into the tonneau. John skipped into the car last. He gave the door a businesslike slam as he had seen taxicab drivers do and called out: “ A’ri’; go ahead! ”

Just as the car was leaving the station yard the same bright blue roadster that had so nearly collided with their machine passed them again. This time it was not going very fast. In it were half a dozen boys. They were laughing loudly and yelling rude remarks at passers-by in the street.

At first glance John picked out Howard Myers, Fred Bates and Wallace Gray from among the six. The other three he did not know. The one at the wheel looked to be older than his companions. He was dark, with a thin, cross face and a sulky mouth. He wore a striped



Palm Beach suit and a Panama hat with a bright blue band around it. The band was exactly the color of the car he drove.

The instant the boys in the blue car saw the Hopkins automobile all but the driver set up loud, derisive groans. They followed the groans with a chorus of squeaky ha-has and shrill calls of: "Now do be careful, James!" "Isn't he a smart little boy?" "Papa said he could run the car!" "The very idea!" As a parting shot Howard Myers yelled: "Oh, you Hopkins kid, why don't you learn to drive?"

"Now why was the wherefore of all that?" Mr. Hopkins asked Jimmy playfully. John was sputtering from the back seat like a lighted fire-cracker. Even Junior had caught the drift of things in time to call a disdainful "Ya, ya, ya!" after Howard Myers.

Jimmy's blue eyes were snapping. "One of those boys in that car was Howard Myers," he said scornfully. "You'd think boys would know more than to yell like that at other boys when they're with their own folks. We've a lot to tell you about him. We didn't say anything about it to you in our letters. We thought we'd rather tell you. But not to-day. We—that is—well, to-

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day's like a holiday, with you coming home and everything. That's what to-day is—a Happy House Holiday. And pretty soon you'll see why."

## CHAPTER II

### A JIMMY-JOHN DINNER

THE car had scarcely come to a standstill on the driveway when John was out of it and tugging at the two heavy suitcases which his father had placed in the tonneau of the machine. Junior followed the suitcases with the cheering information: "There are somefin' nice in the living-room, Favver. Come and see." He extended a cordial hand to his father.

"Well, I guess not!" John had heard the invitation. He set the suitcases down on the walk and rushed back. "Don't you pay any attention to Junie, Father!" he exclaimed in alarm. "Er—why—nobody can go into the living-room for a little while. It's going to be open again pretty soon." John was trying hard not to give out any real information.

"All right. Since I'm not allowed to go into the living-room, please may I go to my own room, Mr. Hopkins?" was the meek question.

John laughed and rushed at his father as though he were going to wrestle with him. For a minute or two they engaged in a lively tussle which ended by Mr. Hopkins picking John up by the legs and arms and laying him on his back on the thick green grass.

“There, that disposes of you. Now I’ll go and vanquish Jimmy and *then* I’ll find out what’s in the living-room.”

“You’ll have both of us to fight then,” Jimmy told him. He had left the car on the drive and joined in the struggle.

“Come on. *I’m* not afraid.” Mr. Hopkins worked his arm muscles tantalizingly.

John got up from the grass in a hurry and he and Jimmy joined forces. The fun began all over again. Junior pranced about the trio, whooping like a small Indian. John was soon decorating the grass a second time. Jimmy was harder to conquer. He gave his father a real tussle. The long summer in the open air had added to his splendid boyish strength.

“Good work,” his father said as the three finally started for the house. “You’re twenty per cent. stronger than you were in the city, Johnny. As for Jimmy—he’s growing too strong for com-



fort. I'm afraid he may put me on the grass one of these fine days."

John and Jimmy pretended that they had to watch their father to be sure he did not go near the living-room. They ended by chasing him up-stairs to his room. Then one sat down on the top step as guard while the other went to the bathroom to wash his hands before dinner. When Mr. Hopkins had changed to a cool linen house suit and was ready to go down-stairs they followed close at his heels, their rubber-soled out-going shoes making a soft patter on the stairs. They had just reached the lower hall when the silver-toned bell told them dinner was ready.

The door leading to the dining-room was closed. Now Mrs. Hopkins opened it and stood smiling at her boys. "Good children!" she said lightly. "You're on time to a second. Where is ——"

"Wait for me. I are hurryin'," wailed an anxious voice from up-stairs in sudden reply to her half-spoken question. Junior appeared on the upper landing and started down-stairs at a speed that meant bumps and tears if he lost his footing.

"Easy there!" His father caught him as he

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safely made port in the hall and swung him to his shoulder. "My goodness, gracious! What's all this?" Mr. Hopkins exclaimed in the next breath as he stepped into the dining-room. "Is the Kangaroo King of Kalamazoo and all his retinue coming to dinner, or what is going to happen?"

"It are a party for *you*," Junior cried in his father's ear from his lofty perch. "Jimmy said I mustn't tell you, an' I didn't."

"Huh, you pretty nearly did," reminded John. "You were going to take Daddy into the living-room."

"Jimmy don't tell me 'bout the living-room. Jimmy said 'bout the dining-room," retorted Junior shrewdly.

This made everyone laugh and Junior laughed the loudest of all. He was very much pleased with himself.

John and Jimmy had been given permission to decorate the dining-room to suit themselves. They had painstakingly painted white banners in red and blue lettering of "Welcome Home," "Happy House is Glad to See You," "'Rah for Daddy," and "East or West, Home is Best." These cheerful greetings festooned the buffet,

the china cabinet and the walls. John had placed an immense bowl of fragrant pink tiger lilies on top of the buffet and a huge bunch of scarlet sage on the serving table. He had chosen red roses for the center of the table and had stripped a bush of late blooming beauties in honor of his father. Tucked in the top of these was a pennant which read: "Roses are sweet, and so is Mother."

There was not room for any decorations other than the roses on the table. It was too full of things to eat. At each end was a large platter stacked high with steaming corn on the cob. The corn on the one platter had come from Jimmy's garden; that on the other had been grown by John. At John's end of the table were also creamed string beans, and crisp lettuce. The small plates of radishes on ice at each one's place, pared to look like little half-opened roses, were from John's garden, too.

Jimmy's platter of corn was flanked by a cut-glass bowl of sliced tomatoes on a bed of lettuce and a large dish of sliced cucumbers. The parsley that decked the roast of beef and furnished pretty green flecks in the creamed new potatoes Jimmy had grown.

The real triumph of the dinner had been fur-



nished by Junior. At Mr. Hopkins' plate was a small dish which held exactly three beets. They were good-sized and had been carefully skinned.

Junior had not troubled himself to go near his garden since the weeds had grown high and choked out the few straggling plants which had come up after the rough treatment he had given his bit of ground. When gradually John and Jimmy had begun to gather the ripened fruits of their work, Junior had begun to grow interested in gardening again. He had gone over his garden two or three times to see if he could not find some "vegtubbles" like John's and Jimmy's. All he could find were three sturdy beets. These had managed to survive even his reckless gardening.

He had brought Jimmy on the run to see them and had anxiously asked: "Are those good for Favver to eat?" Jimmy had said: "Course they are, if you pull the weeds away from 'em and give 'em a chance." "I are going to," Junior had replied with a wag of his curly head, and from that time on the three beets had received tender care. Junior had fairly hung over them, so eager was he that they should turn out well for "Favver."



"You wanted to know what all this was," John declared excitedly, taking his father by the arm and walking him to his place at table. "Well, this is a vegetable dinner, and Jimmy and I grew all the vegetables except the potatoes."

"This is my half of the table and that's John's." Jimmy had escorted his mother to her place. "There's some of everything here except the cabbages, pumpkins and watermelons. They aren't ripe yet. Oh, yes, I didn't pull any onions 'cause I thought nobody'd want 'em."

"*That's mine,*" Junior cried, pointing his forefinger at the plump trio of beets. "I made those grow. They are just for you. Netta's going to fix 'em nice pretty soon."

"I'm *amazed!*" Mr. Hopkins threw up his hands in round-eyed surprise. "I don't see how you did it."

"That's what *I* thought when I saw nothing but weeds in his garden," put in John with a chuckle. "When he saw our garden stuff he thought he ought to have some, too, so he went and hunted up those three beets."

"You've got to eat some of everything we have on the table," Jimmy said, "even if it's only a little wee bit."

“I see it’s a good thing that I’m very, very hungry,” Mr. Hopkins replied soberly. “Your surprises are almost as good as the ones I get up. This is what I’d call a real Jimmy-John dinner.”

“Oh, *this* isn’t all!” John exclaimed. “You just watch and see what is coming next.”

John and Jimmy had a good deal to tell their father about their gardens as the dishes of appetizing, fresh vegetables were passed back and forth among them. Junior wriggled about impatiently until Netta came and took the cherished beets to the kitchen to “fix them.” When she brought them back they were sliced and covered with a special dressing.

The dessert was blackberry pudding with whipped cream, with coffee for Mr. and Mrs. Hopkins and lemonade for the three Js. Before they had quite finished eating the pudding John stood up and announced that he had a poem to read.

“The name of this poem is ‘Welcome.’ It isn’t half as good as the one Father wrote when we named the house, but I couldn’t make up one like *that*, and neither could Jimmy. Anyway, this is quite a nice poem, and I hope you’ll like it.” John pulled a folded paper from his blouse

pocket with a little show of boyish pride. He said, "U-m, 'hem," and then read in clear, round tones:

“WELCOME

“Dear Daddy, we do miss you so  
When you are gone from here:  
We wish you didn't have to go,  
But stayed at home all year.

We are so glad to have you come  
From cities far away,  
To stay a while with us at home  
And see you every day.

We've lots to tell you of our fun  
And all the games we play:  
Our baseball team's a dandy one—  
We practice every day.

We call our team the Winners:  
We wrote you about that—  
We forget to come to our dinners  
When we are at the bat.

Our house is truly Happy House,  
And Junior has tamed Doodle,  
To follow him all over,  
Just like a little poodle.

This poem is to welcome you,  
And I would like to say,  
That we have not had any fights  
While you have been away.



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We're going to tell you all the news,  
But not right at this time.  
It is quite hard to write a poem  
So I will close this rhyme."

John's poem was received with an energetic hand-clapping all around which his father began. He turned red as one of the big full-blown roses in the centerpiece and ducked his head rather shyly. John was not thinking about how clever he was to be able to write a poem. He was thinking only of greeting his father, so he was not prepared to be praised.

"I couldn't have written that," Jimmy said very positively. "So you see, Johnny, you're smarter about some things than I am. You needn't worry 'cause I can pitch better than you and jump farther. You can write poems and play the piano."

"That's a wise way to look at things, Jimsie," said his mother. "I don't want our boys ever to be jealous of one another."

"They won't be," their father said quickly. "They have too much good sense, haven't you, three Js?"

There was a concerted "Yes," in which Junior, not understanding the question, came out behind



the other with a sharp little yell. Mr. Hopkins asked John to read the poem again and said he would like the manuscript of it as a souvenir of the Jimmy-John dinner. Mrs. Hopkins said she thought she ought to have a copy of it, too. John promised her one the very next day.

Suddenly Mr. Hopkins began to pound on the table with his coffee spoon and to call out exactly like Junior when he was determined to have something he wanted. "You show me the nice surprise, Jimmy," he said in a funny, coaxing voice. "I are a good boy, I are."

Jimmy and John giggled. Junior seemed quite fascinated at his father's performance.

"That's the way you do, Junie," John told the beaming youngster.

"I like me," Junior declared. "You act like me some more, Favver. You don't do that before, never since we came to this place."

"No," Mr. Hopkins shook his head, "now you must act like me. See if you can talk just the way I do. You have to go away down like this." He gave a deep bass growl.

Junior drew in his dimpled chin and gurgled a few sounds meant to be very deep.

"That sounds more like the way Doodle does

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when he's walking around the chicken yard," Jimmy said, laughing. "You can't talk way down low, Junie."

"I don't have any growler in my neck. I are too little yet," Junior calmly returned.

This explanation set them all laughing again and it was a very merry and happy family that started for the living-room with Junior leading the way at a frisky hop, skip and jump. John and Jimmy pushed back the sliding oak doors which were usually shoved out of sight, leaving only the summer draperies to half curtain the wide space.

"Well, bless my heart!" exclaimed Mr. Hopkins as his eyes rested on one corner of the room and stayed there. "Great Jumping Jupiter! Goodness me! Who would have thought it!" He appeared to grow more surprised with each exclamation. "This is the nicest surprise I ever had. I've heard a good deal about Christmas trees, but I never before heard of an August tree. And now I'm really seeing one!"

## CHAPTER III

### AN AUGUST TREE

“THIS are a present tree, just like Christmas,” Junior made haste to inform his father, “only it’s got pink flowers on it, and they grew there. Christmas trees have only green leaves till Muvver puts pretty things on ’em.”

“I see.” Mr. Hopkins nodded solemnly and made such a funny face at Junior that it set the little boy into a gale of delighted chuckles.

“Well, we didn’t want a real Christmas tree in August so we thought this kind would be fine,” John said, pointing to the tall well-bushed oleander tree with its glossy green leaves and graceful rose-colored blooms.

The oleander stood in a good-sized wooden tub, painted green. Because it was so pretty in its gorgeous deep pink flowering the boys had chosen it as the very best tree for their surprise. It had been standing in the back yard, when they first arrived at Happy House, near one corner of the



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house. They had carried it indoors themselves, and the job had left them red-faced and heaving. The combination of soil, tub and tree made a heavy load.

Jimmy had cut out a large crescent moon of silver paper and perched it at the highest point of the tree. Mrs. Hopkins had suggested this bit of ornamentation. John had made a fancy motto from gilt paper and put on it in dark blue letters: "Happy House Wishes Father a Happy August." The two boys had cut out a number of smaller moons and fancy paper designs and tucked them among the oleander's leaves. They were careful not to weigh the tree down with anything heavy. The presents were arranged in a pile in front of the green tub. There was quite a heap of them, for the boys had planned the tree long enough beforehand to have time to select a number of articles which they thought Mr. Hopkins would like.

All the presents were for him. They had agreed that it would be more fun to have it that way. Mrs. Hopkins had driven with her sons several times to a good-sized city about twenty-five miles from Lakeview. There they had stayed a day each time and had bought the presents.



John had spent almost all of the money he had started to save to buy a toy aeroplane, and Jimmy had parted with six dollars and fifty-two cents which he had saved up. Even Junior had taken along his little bulldog bank which held three quarters, two dimes, eight pennies, a street-car ticket and a green button.

A few feet from the August tree were two chairs which Jimmy had placed side by side for their father and mother. John had had more to say at the dinner, but Jimmy was master of ceremonies this time.

“Please, Daddy and Mother, sit in those chairs,” Jimmy directed. “And, Daddy, don’t mind if Mother doesn’t get any presents, for she wouldn’t let us buy her a single thing. They’re all for you.”

“H-a-a-a!” Mr. Hopkins dropped into his chair as though overcome by this news. “I don’t want all the presents ’neath the shade of the August tree, youngsters.”

“You’ll have to have ’em. They don’t fit anybody but you,” Jimmy returned with a tantalizing smile. “John, you go and call Netta. She’ll want to see Daddy get his presents.”

John obediently went to bring Netta who soon

appeared behind him, her bright Irish face all smiles. Jimmy drew up a chair for her beside his mother.

“I’ll begin with the largest package first,” he announced, and picked up an immense round bundle wrapped in heavy paper. Strangely enough it had little weight, large as it was. The wrapper was held together by pins, and when these were unfastened there came from the paper folds a very wide straw hat such as farmers wear in haying time.

“That’s mine. I buyed you that!” Junior cried enthusiastically. “I saw it in a store and it are nice for you to wear in the garden. You can’t wear it on a train. It are too big. You wear it at home, but not when you go ’way.”

“No, I don’t think it would be best to wear it on the train,” his father agreed as he reached out and caught Junior and hugged him. “I’ll wear it all day to-morrow, in the house and out, and the next day, too.”

During the trips the three Js and Mrs. Hopkins had made to the neighboring city, Junior had clung to his money like a miser. He saw nothing that pleased him to give to his father. On the way home from the last of these trips, he

had spied the hat in the window of a little country store. Junior had made up his mind in about five seconds that he wanted that hat. It cost eighty-five cents and he had bought it. The moment he had reached home he had put it on and gone out to show it to Doodle. Doodle had had to puzzle out who it was by a pair of chubby bare legs and a little blue linen suit. He certainly had not seen Junior's face, for the big hat had dropped down over his head showing not even the tip of his chin.

John's chief gift to his father was a black leather belt. He also gave a silver key ring, done up in many papers and two silk four-in-hand ties. Jimmy had picked out as his gifts a bathrobe of Turkish weave with slippers to match, a fat, black memorandum book and a cigar lighter. The cigar lighter was as well-wrapped as was the key ring. John and Jimmy loved to play this very old joke on Mr. Hopkins for he always said so many funny things while he was undoing the padded presents.

Mrs. Hopkins had chosen a fine black leather traveling case which she knew her husband wanted very much. Junior's real gift to his father selected by his mother was a black silk



umbrella. Netta had insisted on buying Mr. Hopkins a book on how to grow dahlias which she had heard him speak of. She had also embroidered him half a dozen Turkish wash cloths. The givers had all been agreed that they ought to make as much "fuss" over the August tree for Mr. Hopkins as he always made over their Christmas tree.

"I'm running out of surprise words!" Mr. Hopkins at length exclaimed as he continued to open mysterious packages handed him by Jimmy. "I've said everything I can think of to let you kind, generous people see that I'm overcome, overwhelmed, overjoyed, over-charmed and overhappy because I wasn't overlooked."

He perched the big hat on the crown of his head, slipped his arms into the bathrobe, hung the ties about his neck, fastened on the belt over the robe, stuck one of Netta's embroidered wash cloths into a coat pocket like a handkerchief, put the cigar lighter in another pocket and hung the key ring on his thumb. He opened the umbrella and held it over him with one hand; in the other he carried the traveling case.

"There, who says I'm not dressed up?" he demanded, and paraded up and down the living-



room two or three times. The three Js were delighted with this performance and ran after him, shrieking with laughter.

"This is a lot of fun," John said when his father finally came to a stop near the living-room doorway. "We'll have an August tree every August just for Father. We'll have ——"

"Oh, here, where are you going?" Jimmy called out just as his father slipped through the doorway and hurriedly started up-stairs. "This isn't the end of the party. There's some more to it."

"Be back soon. Don't you dare to follow me." Mr. Hopkins took the stairs, three at a time, and disappeared into his room.

"I'm coming right after you," threatened Jimmy. He skipped up several steps, then turned and went back to the living-room. He knew his father had some jolly plan in mind for them all.

It was fully fifteen minutes before they heard his step on the stairs. It was accompanied by an odd, bumping sound. Junior ran into the hall. He began laughing and clapping his hands. The others heard him give a funny little squeal of pleasure. He came running back into the living-

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room, full of excitement. "Favver's got lots of presents!" he cried.

"Now you went and spoiled my nice surprise," Mr. Hopkins declared in a grieved tone. "You spoiled it by at least five seconds." Junior knew his father was "funning," so he only laughed.

Mr. Hopkins walked into the living-room, holding up a very queer tree of his own invention which bore presents, too. "There, what do you think of that tree?" He set it down carefully in the middle of the room.

A burst of laughter greeted the question.

"And it's the same ould hat tree I was tellin' the movin' men about three times runnin' when it's out here we was movin'," chuckled Netta. "Sure and I never onct thought it would be bearin' thim kinds of fruit!"

The mahogany hat tree which usually stood in one corner of Mr. Hopkins' dressing-room had blossomed out with a variety of odd-shaped and odd-sized bundles.

"Now I know *why* those two suitcases were extra heavy." John nodded triumphantly. "They had all these in 'em." He waved a hand toward the loaded tree.

"We didn't want you to bring us a *single thing*

this time," Jimmy said regretfully. "You always do. This time we wanted it to be our turn."

"Well, I had promised a prize to the tip-toppest gardener, hadn't I? While I was zipping around looking that up, I thought I might as well buy a few more things. I never know ahead of time what wonderful things you three Js may do. John ought to have a special prize for his poem."

As he talked Mr. Hopkins had untied a fairly large bundle from one of the lowest knobs of the hat tree.

"Here you are, sir." He handed it to Junior who received it with open arms.

The little boy had the wrapper off in a second and was rejoicing gleefully over a full-rigged toy ship.

The next package was for John. It proved to be a dark blue bathing suit with ornamental lines of white around the open jersey neck and the edge of the trunks. Jimmy soon had the mate to John's suit. Junior reaped a wooden pail and shovel for sand digging and a pink and green toy lighthouse. John and Jimmy were delighted with a fine baseball, a catcher's mask, a



pair of mitts and a good bat. The bat and the mitts fell to Jimmy; the mask and the ball to John.

"You boys can own the baseball outfit together," their father told them. "We all live in Happy House, so you aren't likely to have any squabbles over them," he slyly added.

"*I guess not,*" was the emphatic answer from both boys.

"Seems to me there ought to be a few hat-tree posies for Mother and Netta." Mr. Hopkins wrinkled his forehead and peered sharply at the few bundles still tied to the tree. "*Of course!*" He gave a loud sigh of relief and handed his wife a flat, oblong package. He passed a much larger one to Netta.

Mrs. Hopkins cried out with pleasure at the beautiful string of pearl beads which she saw when she unfastened the snap of a black leather box. Netta was full of warm Irish gratitude over a handsome dark blue silk dress pattern. Before they were done exclaiming Mr. Hopkins dumped another package into each of their laps and gave one more apiece to the three Js. These last were boxes of fancy candy. The hat tree stood stripped of its strange yield.



When Junior had opened his first package and found the little ship, John and Jimmy had exchanged meaning glances. When they found the new bathing suits and saw Junior's pail and shovel and lighthouse they did more than look at each other. They set up a soft chuckling. They kept it going until Mrs. Hopkins and Netta began to laugh, too. Something very funny was in the air.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE REAL SURPRISE

“SEE here, *what* is going on behind my back?” Mr. Hopkins pretended to glare severely at the youngsters. “No fair having secrets. I want to chortle and chuckle and giggle, too. So does Junie. Hurry up, now. Tell us something to laugh at.”

Junior had been too busy with his new toys to pay much attention to the gigglers. He looked up and beamed when he heard his father say “Junie.”

“I are goin’ to take all my new play toys to the sheashore,” he declared. “Now I are goin’ to show Doodle my lighthouse. Doodle ——” Junior made a sudden pause. He happened to recall what he had said at the dinner table last night about Doodle. He had said he was going to stay at home from the seashore and teach Doodle to talk. “I don’t go to the sheashore,” he announced flatly. “I don’t want to go.

Nobody in this house are goin'. Muvver said so; so did Jimmy. I can sail my boat in the lake. You please take me to the lake to-morrow, Favver? "

"*Now!* You've gone and told *that* surprise before we wanted it told!" John's voice rose almost to a wail. "What did you do that for, Junie? Jimmy was going to make a speech about it and everything."

Mrs. Hopkins and Netta laughed harder than ever. So did Jimmy. Junior looked so puzzled as he sat on the floor and stared up at John with round, half-frightened eyes. He had not forgotten the last hard scolding John had given him when he had meddled with John's cabbage plants. He got quickly up from the floor and sidled over to his mother.

"Oh, I'm not *very* cross with you, Junie." John was fighting back being vexed. "Never mind. Jimmy can go ahead and make his speech, anyway."

"I think someone *ought* to make a speech and tell me what all this hubbub's about." Mr. Hopkins looked much injured. He pouted his lips reproachfully and rolled accusing eyes at Jimmy. "You all seem to know a good deal more than I

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know about the Hopkins family. I once thought I knew quite a lot about them. Now I see I don't know what I know."

"You're going to know right off," Jimmy said quickly. "Ahem!" He straightened his shoulders and made his father a little bow. Then he began in his blunt, direct way:

"This isn't a real speech. It is just a talk to let you know what we know about something we think you'll like. Last night when Mother read us your letter we were feeling happy because something good had happened to John, mostly, but to me, too, and to some of the boys we play with. 'Course your letter made us feel better still. We were so glad we were going to see you right away."

"*Were we?*" John forgot Jimmy was making a speech and cut jubilantly into it. "Oh, I forgot." He clapped a hand to his mouth. "'Scuse me, Jimmy."

Jimmy nodded amiably and went on to say: "We hadn't thought much about going to the seashore this summer because we had such a lot of nice things planned to do at home. When we began to think about it we found we didn't want to go at all. Mother said, when we asked her



what she wanted to do, that she had rather stay at home this year, and she thought you would, too. We've been to the beach every summer since we could walk, but this is our very first one at Happy House. And it's been such a dandy summer!" Jimmy's eyes sparkled. "There are lots of pleasant things for you to do here, too, that you couldn't have at the shore. We hope you will like our plan. We saved it for the last surprise of all. Only we had to laugh when we saw all the things for the beach. But we thank you for them, just the same. We thank you a whole lot, Daddy, for everything." Here Jimmy's speech ended.

"Yes," John began as Jimmy left off, "we thank you about a million times. Do you think you'd rather stay at home?" he added anxiously.

"There's only one answer to that question; a great big 'Yes.'" Mr. Hopkins smiled fondly down at his sons' eager faces as they stood together facing him. He placed a hand on a shoulder of each. "It's an even better surprise than the Jimmy-John dinner. I like the shore, boys, but this year I'd far rather be at home, since I can spare only a week."

"We want you to see our team play and have

a good time with us. Maybe we can go on a long ride in the car and have a picnic," planned Jimmy.

"I'll tell you what we will do," was the cheering answer. "We'll take one day of my vacation and have a picnic at Rainbow Lake. Then you can wear your new bathing suits. I'll take you in swimming. Junie can take his new playthings along and we'll all have a generally jolly time. We'll take Netta with us, too."

"Why not invite the boys who stood by John, Jimmy?" Mrs. Hopkins was quick to suggest. "They would love a picnic, and you boys would love to go swimming for once with them. You see Father will be with you to keep watch of you."

"Oh, say, that would be great." Jimmy went over to his mother and gave her a fond hug. "That would be a fine way to thank them for what they did for John."

"Let me see. What was it they did for John?" Mr. Hopkins asked innocently with a mischievous, sidelong glance toward his wife.

"You'll have to wait until to-morrow for us to tell you. This is a holiday, you know," reminded John tantalizingly.

“Oh, very well. Tell me nothing. I think you’re so mean, though. Never mind. I sha’n’t give out the garden prize to-night, so I’m even with you.”

“Oh, it’s getting dark. You couldn’t see how our gardens look, anyway. We’d just as soon wait till to-morrow,” John returned serenely. “We can tell you about our baseball team and the circus we’re going to have. There isn’t any secret about them.”

“Let’s pick up the papers and our presents, Johnny, and then we can all sit down and have a big talk,” Jimmy proposed, making an energetic sweep of the papers scattered about him.

Junior objected to having either his new belongings or the papers they came in touched. He lugged them to a corner of the living-room and sat happily down in the midst of them for a good play. He was to stay up until Jimmy and John went to bed and he intended to make good use of this privilege.

Netta stayed in the living-room that evening. Mr. and Mrs. Hopkins were very fond of the lively Irish girl. They liked to hear her talk. She always had something funny to tell them about herself and her family who had all come to



the United States from Ireland when Netta was only twelve years old. John and Jimmy were so much interested in her lively tales they forgot all about talking of the baseball team.

Netta had a surprise to offer, too. About half-past eight she left the living-room. Presently she returned, trundling the tea wagon. On it was a treat of small fancy cakes and frozen custard. This was her contribution to the holiday.

"Netta had the very last surprise of all." Jimmy bit appreciatively into one of Netta's famous nut cakes. "These cakes are so good with frozen custard. I like it best of any ice-cream."

"I guess we're lucky to have Netta," John said wisely. "Nelson White says their girl, Huldah, is awful cross. She can cook things all right, but she won't let him have cookies and crullers when he wants 'em."

"Now listen to that! An' it's meself'll never be refusin' yez cakes unless yer ma says yez can't have 'em," Netta laughingly assured.

"We didn't say a word about our team to Daddy to-night," Jimmy said to John as the two



boys went sleepily up to bed. "But I don't care. I like to listen to Nétta."

"We will to-morrow. And, say, Jimmy, we'll have to be as busy as anything all of next week. Dick says some of the Seven A fellows, who are going to be Eight B this fall, want to play us. They're just about our size. If we hustle we can have a game while Father's home, and the circus, too. I think he'd like to see us play ball, don't you?"

"Of course. Why, if Daddy was watching the Winners play ball we would just *have* to make our team win." Jimmy spoke with great confidence. "We'd better go and see Dick to-morrow. Maybe Daddy will go down near Dick's house with the car. If he does, we'll ask him to take Dick and us for a drive on Lakeview Pike."

"Yes, we must see the rest of the fellows, too. I guess the Winners had better meet at the cave and have a talk. They can come here first and all of us together can soon carry our stuff back to the cave again. Isn't it fine that we may have the cave now all the time? No one will chase us out of it, either. It's ours to play in." John gave a little nod of satisfaction.

The two boys talked eagerly of their plans

while they were getting ready for sleep. Toward the last, however, their talk began to lag. The last word Jimmy said was "Y-e-e-s," followed by "Ah-h-oo-ee-a-a-h!" John's good-night speech was "Uh-huh-ya-a-a-a-a-mm-m!"

Jimmy slept so soundly he did not even dream. John dreamed that Howard Myers was chasing him in a bright blue car. He was running along Lakeview Pike and he had on the large straw hat and the bathrobe which had been on the August tree for his father. John thought he had the traveling case in one hand and Junior's lighthouse in the other. He kept stumbling over the bathrobe and the blue car kept gaining on him. Finally he fell down hard in the middle of the road and the car bumped into him. Then he saw it was not Howard Myers and a blue car, but Netta with the tea wagon.

He woke up to find himself half-way under his bed instead of sprawling on Lakeview Pike. He rubbed the back of his head which had bumped smartly on the smooth matting, giggled softly to himself and climbed into bed again. He was asleep in two minutes. Nor did he wake again until he opened his drowsy eyes to find his mother shaking him gently by the shoulder.

“Wake up, lazy Johnny,” she was saying laughingly. “It’s after eight o’clock. Jimmy was up an hour ago and has gone for a ride with Daddy. He called you, but you never heard him you were so busy sleeping. Come downstairs to the ’phone. Dick wishes to talk with you.”

“Dick? Oh!” John slid from the bed like a flash. “I fell out of bed in the middle of the night,” he confessed with a little snicker, as he pattered down the stairs behind his mother. “I guess that’s what made me sleep so hard when I got back in again. I had such a funny dream. I’ll tell you all about it soon as I’ve talked to Dick.” He ran to the telephone full of pleasant excitement. Something quite remarkable must have happened to bring this early morning ’phone call from Dick.

## CHAPTER V

### THE GARDEN PRIZE

“HELLO, hello!” came in Dick Carter’s treble tones over the line. “Is that you? I mean is it John?”

“Yes, it’s me,” returned John loudly and ungrammatically. “I just got out of bed to come to the ’phone.”

“I guess you *are* a lazy one,” Dick returned. “Say, what do you think? I got a letter from old fatty Howard Myers in our mail box this morning. Maybe he isn’t good and mad at me for hiding his clothes. He says I think I’m some smarty, but I’m just a fresh kid. He says quite a lot more, and it’s about our team. I’m coming up to your house this afternoon and show you and Jimmy the letter, if you’re not going away anywhere with your father.”

“We were going to ask him to run us down to your house in the car and take you for a ride. You’d better come up. We’ll go for a ride from here. Do you think your mother would let you



stay to dinner?" John inquired hopefully. "My mother says you are always welcome."

"Don't know. Wait a minute. I'll ask her." Dick's reply held a dubious note. He had eaten a good many meals at Happy House that summer.

John wriggled and shifted impatiently from one foot to the other while waiting for Dick's return to the 'phone. Dick was gone at least ten minutes. He gave a triumphant "hello" into the transmitter, then said:

"My mother says I may come to dinner this one more time, and then not again until you and Jimmy come to my house to eat. She says I've eaten more meals at your house than home, she guesses. Anyway, I may come to-day. I have to do two errands for her, though, and mow the side yard, so I'll have to hustle. Good-bye! Hooray! I'll see you later!" Dick shouted this joyous farewell, hung up with a snappy little click and was off to his three labors.

John hurried through his morning scrub. He ate alone in the little morning room next to the kitchen, and carried half of his sticky cinnamon bun to the front porch, there to eat it at leisure and watch for the car. He was sure that Jimmy

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would not tell his father any of the things they had decided to tell him together.

About half-past nine the car came speeding up the drive. Junior had gone on that early morning ride, too. In fact, Junior was almost always out of bed in the morning ahead of the rest of the Hopkins family. Netta often used to say: "It's Joonyer and meself that's always after gettin' the breakfast ready, now ain't it, Joonie?"

For once Junior had secured the coveted front seat beside his father. Jimmy sat alone in the tonneau.

"A-a-a-a," Junior leveled a fat finger at John who had come forward to meet them, "*you're* a lazybones. You don't get up at all."

"If I didn't get up at all, I wouldn't be here," John retorted with a half sheepish grin. "Anyway, I don't have to take a nap in the afternoon."

Junior grinned and ducked his curly head. He understood that he had started the teasing and must expect that John would tease him in return.

"Will you take us out in the car this afternoon, Daddy?" John asked. "Dick's coming to Happy House. His mother said he might stay to dinner."

"Yes. Leave the car on the drive, then,

Jimsie.” Jimmy had slipped into the driver’s seat as soon as his father had vacated it and was about to run the machine to the garage. Mr. Hopkins started up the veranda steps. He half turned and said: “I’m going into the library to write a letter. When I have finished writing I’ll take a walk with you to your gardens. Then we’ll give out the great prize and you can tell me all these exciting tales you’ve been bottling up for my benefit.”

“Come on and sit down on the steps. I want to tell you about Dick.” John dropped to the top step of the veranda and crooked his finger invitingly to Jimmy.

“Was Dick here so early?” Jimmy asked in surprise.

“No; I was talking to him on the ’phone—before I was up. I mean, before I was dressed, except in my pajamas. Mother woke me up and said he wanted to talk to me. He got a letter from Howard Myers in the mail and he’s going to bring it up here and show it to us. It has a lot in it about our team.”

“What does Howard Myers know about our team?” Jimmy replied in boyish disgust. “I don’t think he ever saw us practice. Do you?”



"I never saw him around when we were playing catch. Dick says he was captain last spring of a team of Six B fellows. He's only in Six B. But you know most of the Six B boys aren't as large as we are. Dick said the team wasn't any good."

"I wouldn't like to play against a team of boys like that. Of course we'd win. Then we'd always feel that it wasn't very much of a win. I'd rather play fellows even larger than we are. Our team is fine, you know. We play a dandy game of ball." Jimmy frowned at the idea of playing against smaller boys.

"Well, we wouldn't challenge Howard Myers' team to a game, anyhow," John said decidedly, "and he wouldn't challenge our team, for he doesn't like any of us."

The brothers were still deep in the discussion of what Howard Myers might or might not do when Mr. Hopkins appeared in the vestibule door.

"All right," he called in his brisk fashion. "Away we go to see what we shall see." He took an arm of each son and marched them playfully across the lawn to their garden plots.

"You won't see anything very wonderful when



you see my garden," John told him. "It looks pretty well, but Jimmy's is the best. It looks better than the one Jabez tends to. Jabez says Jimmy can beat him taking care of one." Jabez was the old colored man who took care of the family garden. "Junie ought to have a booby prize. His garden is a regular jungle. It has weeds eight feet high in it. Jimmy and I used to take turns weeding it for him. After while we didn't see anything but just weeds, so we didn't bother with it."

"I don't believe Junie was cut out for a gardener," laughed his father. "I think he'd succeed better as a rooster trainer."

"He says he's going to have a garden next year, just the same," said Jimmy. "When he saw us beginning to pick vegetables and heard us talking about having a vegetable dinner for you, he wanted to be in it, too. He hunted around and found those three beets. He pulled all the weeds away from around them and watered them every day. I guess Junie ought to have a prize for those three beets."

"He says he's going to have only beets for you, flowers for Mother and corn for Doodle in his garden next year," John continued where

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Jimmy left off. "One day at lunch he took a banana from the dish and said he was going to plant it. He did, too—right in the middle of the canna bed. He was sure it would come up. When it didn't he got mad at us every time we said anything about it."

While Mr. Hopkins listened and laughed at Junior's misadventures in gardening he walked up and down the beaten garden paths and appraised his boys' work. John and Jimmy followed him, talking busily.

"Right-o, Johnny. Jimmy wins the prize," he announced presently. "I never saw a prettier bit of gardening, Jimmy."

Jimmy flushed to the roots of his yellow hair. "I only worked hard with it because I liked to dig and make things grow. I like gardening better than John does. It was easier for me than for him to do it," he explained. He almost hated to be told that he had outdone John.

"Yes, and I had to practice an hour every day on the piano, so Jimmy had a little more time than I had," John reminded. "Anyway, I'm going to have a garden next year, just the same as this. Netta put up a good many cans of beans and corn from my garden."

“You’ve done gloriously as a farmer,” his father said merrily. “Now the prize happens to be in the cellar.”

“In the cellar!” cried both boys.

“Yes, I had it sent by express from the city and your mother managed to get it into the house without you fellows seeing it. It will belong to Jimmy, but you’ll really share it, John. I had to decide between it and a very good radio set. I chose it because I want you boys out in the open air while the weather is good. Time enough in winter weather for you to stay in the house and listen over radio. You’ve done so well, Johnny, about not teasing Junie that I think the radio set will be for you.”

John’s dark eyes gleamed like two lamps at this news. “I’d rather have the radio set than even that aeroplane I’ve been saving for!” he exclaimed happily. “The cellar was a good place to hide the prize. Jimmy and I hardly ever go down there.”

“Well, we’ll go down there now. You can help me bring it up.” Mr. Hopkins took them by the arms again and started to pilot them cellarward.

The prize was in a huge thick, oblong package



of the heaviest kind of wrapping paper. It took some time to undo it. When the wrappings were finally off, the two Js set up a glad crowing. It was a complete tennis set; nets, racquets, and balls. The stakes for the nets were in another bundle.

While they lived in the city John and Jimmy had played parlor tennis several times at the homes of their playmates. Jimmy had been keen to learn to play what he called "real tennis." He said he would join a tennis club as soon as he was old enough. Then he had not dreamed that they would go to live in the country. He had been so busy with delightful new things to do since coming to Lakeview that he had not thought much about tennis. Now it seemed as though everything he had ever wanted to do or play was marching straight up to him and saying, "I'm here. Take me."

When the happy enthusiasm over the new tennis set had died down, John and Jimmy steered their father back to the veranda again. They made him a kind of throne with soft cushions of the porch swing and bowed him into it. John went up-stairs and came back with a most precious possession. It was the letter which he had



received from Mr. Burton. They drew up a wicker settee, that would hold them both, squarely in front of the swing and settled themselves in it with much laughter.

Then began the tale of the cave and all the exciting happenings that had followed Mr. Burton's unlucky tumble on the top of it. Jimmy began the story, but John supplied bits of information quite frequently and sometimes both talked at once.

Mr. Hopkins kept a becomingly grave face for a while. When it came to Mr. Burton's fall on the cave roof, he laughed outright. He also laughed heartily over Dick's mischievous method of making Howard Myers "own up."

"We want you to tell us just what you think about everything," Jimmy said. "You've let us tell you, but you haven't said anything yourself."

"Go on and read me your letter, Johnny. Then we'll talk about the cave dwellers who lost their cave and found it again."

John read the cherished letter, very proud of the fact that it had been actually written to him by Mr. Burton.

"Do you remember what I told you the day we went to call on Mr. Burton?" Mr. Hopkins

asked as John finished the letter and folded it again.

“Yes, Daddy. You said I’d lost something more valuable than money; that I’d lost Mr. Burton’s good opinion. But I got it back again,” he added, with a little dignified lift of his brown head.

“Yes, you did, and you were lucky. Still you might not have if all your boy friends hadn’t turned in and helped you. Now I understand what Mother meant. Those boys certainly deserve a picnic at Rainbow Lake, and we will see that they have it. They proved themselves true friends.”

“And Dick most of all,” declared Jimmy. “Dick knew how bad John felt over Mr. Burton thinking he was a mean boy. He was always trying to find a way to let Mr. Burton know John was all right. So Dick will be our best chum forever, won’t he?”

“It looks that way now.” Mr. Hopkins smiled at Jimmy’s earnest tones. Mischievous Dick had won the right to this lifelong chumship.

“It was just as Mother said after we were chased away from the cave,” Jimmy continued. “She said we ought never to have dug up a foot

of ground that didn't belong to us; that if you'd been home it wouldn't have happened. Still, it turned out all right."

"That's not the point. Now I'm not going to lecture you boys about going into strangers' meadows and digging them up. It's too late for a lecture now. But you can see for yourself what a scrape it put you in at the time. If Mr. Burton had hurt himself badly in falling, it would have been a good deal more disagreeable for you. Always play in your own yard as far as you can. Then, if things go wrong, you're at home, at least."

"You're not going to say we can't go and play in the cave any more, are you, Daddy?" John looked his alarm.

"Oh, no. You've had troubles enough already. I won't add to them," was the amused reply. "As for this Myers boy. You're clear of his spite now, John; stay clear of it. When you and Jimmy happen to meet him, treat him as you would a stranger. If he calls unkind speeches after you, or taunts you, as he and his friends did yesterday, go on about your own affairs as though you had not heard him. He is only trying to stir you into a temper so that you



will do or say something you'll be ashamed of afterward. A boy like that ——"

A piercing shriek, followed by a succession of frantic, high-pitched yells suddenly brought Mr. Hopkins to his feet. He darted into the house and up the front stairs in the direction of the disturbing sounds. Jimmy sprang up from the settee so violently he almost tipped John to the veranda floor. They set off after their father just as Netta and Mrs. Hopkins appeared in the hall and joined the hurrying procession. All knew too well those shrill, familiar squeals. Junior was in mischief again and things had turned out badly.

## CHAPTER VI

### A STORM AT SEA

IF Jimmy and John had not been so absorbed in their own plans they might have noticed Junior's absence when they went out to their gardens with their father. Junior usually joined all such expeditions, though he soon lost interest in them and flitted away to something that he found more amusing. Having had a long spin on the front seat of the car, Junior remembered the rich harvest of presents he had reaped from the hat tree. He had carefully arranged them in the corner of the living-room where he had been playing the evening before. To think of his new pail and shovel and his white-sailed boat was to go and look for them.

After a few failures he managed to hang the pail and shovel over one dimpled wrist and get his short arms around the ship and the lighthouse. Then he set off for the chicken park to show Doodle his treasures. At the gate he had

to let go of his load in order to open it. He shoved the pail and shovel in first. The ship and lighthouse followed them. Junior had been told over and over again never to leave the chicken yard gate open. He had done so once and the chickens had had a wonderful outing in the gardens and on the lawn until Jimmy had spied them and brought their expedition to a fleeing, squawking end. Junior did not forget what a long time it had taken poor Jimmy to round up the last runaway hen and how vexed he was over it. Thereafter he took pains to close the gate the instant he had passed through.

Doodle had not seen his little owner that morning so he was very friendly and came up to Junior on the run. He gave an inquiring "Cuh-huh?" and poked his neck forward to see what was in the pail. The ship and the lighthouse had no charm for him.

"I don't bring you anything to eat—not yet, Doodle. You look at my new presents now. After while I are going to bring you some corn and a cookie." Junior flourished the ship before Doodle's eyes.

Doodle began a slow and stately march around Junior, his attention fixed on the pail. Junior



turned it upside down on the ground to prove to his pet that it held nothing. Doodle still kept a hungry eye on it.

“I know what you want, Doodle!” Junior happened to think that Jimmy sometimes dug up the dirt in spots in the chicken yard so that the chickens could scratch for bugs and worms. “I are goin’ to dig up some dirt for you with my nice new shovel.” Junior chose a bare spot of ground and dug the little sand shovel into it. He put so much energy into the digging, for the soil was sun-baked and hard, that his shovel soon broke in two.

“N-o-o-w!” He was half ready to cry at this accident. He plumped down in the dirt and tried to fit the two pieces together. Doodle took this chance to snap up an earthworm which Junior had dug. He gobbled it and began peering into the loosened ground for another.

“Shoo, shoo! Go away. I are mad at you, Doodle. See what you made me do.” Junior held up the pieces of shovel then flapped them at his pet. Doodle had run off a few steps and was now strutting cautiously forward again. “Maybe I don’t bring you anything. You don’t know much, anyhow.” Junior scrambled crossly to his

feet, said "Boo-oo!" at Doodle in a loud, displeased voice and began to reload his small self with his playthings.

His little flare of temper did not worry Doodle. It was not the first time Junior had booed at him. Now the little, golden-haired boy had hustled off in the queer way he behaved at times. But he had left the nice bit of turned-up earth behind him. Doodle was just as well pleased. He began eagerly working his new claim and "quawked" to the other chickens to share it with him.

Junior went on into the house. On the way from the chicken yard a bright idea popped into his lively brain. He pattered through the hall and up the stairs as fast as his small, sandaled feet would carry him. He reached the second floor landing just as John and Jimmy and Mr. Hopkins came into the house at the side entrance which led to the cellar. He heard their voices, but paid no attention to them. He was too busy with his own affairs.

Later, while Mr. Hopkins sat listening interestedly to John and Jimmy on the cool, shaded veranda, Junior was having a glorious time as sailing master of his new boat. There was not

so much as a narrow ditch or even a puddle of water about the grounds of Happy House. Junior had asked Jimmy, his idol, "Where are some water at home for me to sail my boat?" Jimmy had replied that the nearest water was Rainbow Lake. Looking proudly at the trim, gaily-painted boat he was carrying, Junior had happened to recall that, once, when they were living in the city, John and Jimmy had sailed two tiny boats for him in the bathtub. Junior was big enough now to sail his own boat in the bathtub; at least he thought he was.

As it happened Mrs. Hopkins and Netta were both in the kitchen talking over the best way to make tomato preserves. Junior had a clear field. The porcelain tub was large and deep. His blue eyes sparkled as he took hold of the rubber plug on its nickel chain. He had to lean so far over he almost pitched headlong into the tub as he worked to put the plug in place. It fitted at last. He clutched one of the faucets in both hands and gave it a hard turn. A stream of cold water gushed into the tub. Junior let go of the faucet and clapped his hands. Next he tried to turn on the other faucet but could not budge it. "You hurry up, old water," he kept saying im-



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patiently as he circled the big white tub and frowned because it did not fill faster. "You hurry up. I are goin' to sail my boat."

When the water had risen until it was within a few inches of the top Junior remembered to turn off the flow. He found this a harder job than turning the water on. He tugged away at the one faucet, then set his lighthouse over the two. It stayed there at a slight tip-tilt. Then he went down to the other end of the tub with his boat. He launched it with a jolly little hurrah and floated his wooden sand pail after it.

The boat obligingly sailed straight to the other end of the tub, bumped into the lighthouse and sent it over the tub's edge to the floor. The pail bobbed aimlessly about, then turned on one side. Junior scrambled to reestablish the lighthouse, right the pail and keep things moving. He sent his boat skimming for the opposite end of the tub and hustled after it. He laughed and cheered and splashed himself with water until his little pink madras suit was thoroughly soaked. Twice, in leaning against the tub's smooth edge, he slipped and plunged both arms into the water to the shoulder.

"Why don't you stay stood up?" he asked the

lighthouse severely as it toppled over for the twelfth time. "I are goin' to get a string and tie you tight. Then you can't fall down."

As he bent to pick up the toy he felt a sudden trickle of cold water on his neck. Next instant a little cascade began to pour over his sandals. "Oooo-oo!" he exclaimed and jumped away from the tub. He flung down the lighthouse, threw up his chubby arms and began to scream.

"Ah-h! Wee-ee! Ow-w-w! Muvver-r-r!" He sent up this shrill call for help as the water rushed over the tub's edge and flowed to the floor with a kind of subdued roar. The gallant ship sailed clear of the tub and capsized. The wooden pail struck against the faucets and anchored there. Meanwhile Junior continued to scream. He waved his arms and danced up and down. The faster the water overflowed the tub the more frightened he grew.

Mr. Hopkins reached the second floor landing first. He was just in time to meet a stream of water winding out of the bathroom into the hall. After it came Junior, his mouth wide open, tears rolling down his rosy cheeks. He caught his father by an arm with a fresh burst of yells.

"Great Scott!" Mr. Hopkins lifted the dis-

tracted sailing master hastily to one side and bounded into the bathroom. It was a second's work to pull the rubber plug from the bottom of the tub. The flood began to subside with a complaining gurgle. The cold water faucet was still running a stream of water. Junior's mischievous hands had not turned it off entirely. Thus disaster had come upon him in the midst of his good time.

"Junior Hopkins, *what* will you do next?" Mrs. Hopkins, Netta, John and Jimmy had now reached the landing. The stream of water flowing through the hall gave Mrs. Hopkins a fair idea of what had happened.

Junior decided he did not need his mother at all and made a frantic dash for the bathroom. She caught him and walked him back into the hall. "*Look* at your suit! It's wringing wet! *Such* a naughty boy! You know better than to get into such mischief. I'm going to punish you for this." Mrs. Hopkins spoke in her sternest voice. Junior knew he was going to have trouble.

"And it's the mop and pail I'll be runnin' for." Netta hurried down-stairs faster than she had come up.



“Quick, boys; go and bring some old cotton cloths from the storeroom,” Mr. Hopkins briskly ordered. “We’ll help Netta wipe up the water before it soaks through the floor to the down-stairs ceiling.”

John and Jimmy were trying hard to keep back their laughter. Junior was wringing wet, even to his curls. His mother was keeping a firm hold on him and he looked so crestfallen as he stood with one pink finger in his mouth that his brothers wanted to shout.

“I am going to put this naughty little boy to bed now,” Mrs. Hopkins looked at Junior in deep displeasure, “and he must stay in bed the rest of the morning and *all* afternoon. I may not let him come down-stairs to dinner this evening.”

“I are *not* goin’ to bed,” Junior flatly announced. “I have to stay here and see Favver. Favver’s goin’ away pretty soon.” He cast a hopeful glance toward his father. Thus far “Favver” hadn’t scolded him.

“Oh, no; you will have to do as Mother tells you,” Mr. Hopkins returned, looking very solemn. “I’m sorry, but you see no one but Junior is to blame for this trouble. He is the little boy who got into mischief.”

Junior stared at his father for a moment. "No-o-o-o!" he burst forth. "I don't want to go to bed. I can't go to bed. I are goin' riding with you this afternoon."

"Not this afternoon." Mr. Hopkins shook his head. "I couldn't think of taking you out in the car to-day."

By this time Netta had returned with the scrub pail and mop and John and Jimmy had come from the storeroom with an armful of cotton cloths. The minute the two boys had gone out of Junior's sight they had begun to laugh. They were still laughing a little when they returned. Mrs. Hopkins was just walking Junior from the scene. He was balking every step of the way and crying loudly. His mother had not allowed him to take along his cherished lighthouse, pail and boat to cheer him in exile and he was not only very unhappy, but decidedly cross.

While John and Jimmy were helping wipe up the flood the door-bell rang loudly three times.

"Maybe that's Dick." Jimmy sprang from the bathroom floor to his feet, tossed the wet wiping cloth onto a heap of others and started for the stairs.

"No, it isn't Dick." John was right behind

him. "Dick won't be here until this afternoon. His mother wouldn't let him come early and stay to lunch and dinner, too."

The two boys' hands found the door-knob together. They opened the door and nearly tumbled backward in surprise. Their caller was Mr. Burton.



## CHAPTER VII

### A QUEER CHALLENGE

“GOOD-MORNING, boys. How are you to-day?” Mr. Burton’s loud voice sounded kind and cheery. He smiled and shook hands with the two boys. “Is your father at home?” he inquired. “I thought I’d drop in and get better acquainted with him.”

“Yes, Mr. Burton,” John and Jimmy said together. They were pleased to see their big visitor and even more pleased because he had happened to call when their father was at home.

“He’ll be glad to see you,” Jimmy said in his direct fashion. “We were telling him about the cave this morning. He’s home from the west, but only for two days. Please come into the living-room. You go and tell him Mr. Burton is here, Johnny.”

Jimmy led the way to the living-room while John sped up-stairs for his father. Mr. Hopkins and Netta were just wiping up the last of Junior’s overflowing sea.

"Tell Mr. Burton I'll be down directly." Mr. Hopkins rolled down the sleeves of his silk outing shirt and hurried to his room to change his wet summer ties. "You and Jimmy know how to do the honors until I get there."

John hurried down-stairs with the message to find Jimmy telling Mr. Burton all about the August tree. The oleander still stood in its corner, gay with its fancy gilt and silver decorations. "What kind of tree would you call that?" Mr. Burton had asked rather curiously.

"We have lots of such funny good times," Jimmy was saying as John entered. "We like to make up surprises for Father when he comes home on his vacations. He gives us fine ones too. We had a dandy one just this morning. We call our house Happy House. There's generally something happy going on in it."

"That's good. I never have any wonderful surprises but I'd like to hear about yours. What was the surprise this morning?"

Mr. Burton's letter had made such an impression on both boys that now neither stood in awe of the big man as they had formerly. He had given them the cave. That made everything right. They began telling him in concert about

the new tennis set. They were giving him an enthusiastic description of it when their father appeared.

Mr. Burton rose from his chair and met Mr. Hopkins half-way across the room with a hearty handclasp.

“Good-morning, Mr. Hopkins,” he said cordially. “I thought I would pay you a neighborly call. I used to consider most of the Lakeview folks as my neighbors, but the town has grown so, I find more strangers of late than neighbors. I was born and brought up in Lakeview. When I was a youngster it was only a handful of little frame houses.”

“I’m very glad to see you,” Mr. Hopkins returned in his genial way. “I understand that you are one of the pioneers of this town.”

John and Jimmy would have liked to stay and hear more of the talk, but Jimmy made a little private signal to John that they must go.

“We think you’d like to talk to Father, Mr. Burton, so we will go on outdoors,” Jimmy said.

“We hope you’ll come and see us often.” John sincerely meant this. He thought some day they might invite Mr. Burton to a ball game, if their team did well.



The shining black car that had caused John so much trouble stood far down the drive. "I guess there isn't anybody around to break the wind shield this time," John said rather grimly as he and Jimmy circled the big machine and looked it critically over.

Mr. Burton's call lasted almost an hour. When he and Mr. Hopkins finally came out on the veranda, they went down the steps and across the lawn to the boys' gardens. Mr. Hopkins called to John and Jimmy. They were walking about the lot trying to pick out the best place for a tennis court. The boys obeyed the call on the run and the last few minutes of Mr. Burton's visit were spent with the two youngsters. This was precisely what Mr. Burton wanted. He had taken a decided fancy to the Hopkins boys and wished to become better acquainted with them.

Lunch was hardly over when Dick came racing up the front walk, his freckled face alive with the news he had to tell. John and Jimmy had posted themselves in the front yard to watch for him the instant they had made hasty, but appreciative, way with their dessert.

"Oh, uh, I'm glad I got here!" Dick made a frisky little bounce and caught Jimmy by one of

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his square shoulders. "I was as 'fraid as anything my mother wouldn't let me come."

"You act like Tipperary," chuckled John.

Tipperary was Netta's pet dog. He was an Irish setter with a rough black and white coat. His real home was with Netta's mother in the city where the Hopkins family had formerly lived. He had been visiting Netta and the boys at Happy House all summer.

"Where is old Tip?" Dick asked. "I haven't seen him lately."

"Oh, he's around here, but he likes Jabez and Junior better than us," John said. "Junior gives him cake, and Jabez talks to him all the time. We think a lot of him, but he thinks they treat him nicer, I guess."

"Who do you suppose came to see us?" Jimmy was eager to tell of their visitor. "Mr. Burton." He answered his own question in the same breath.

"Whe-ew-w," whistled Dick. "That's going some, isn't it? He wasn't mad, or anything, was he? He isn't going to make us give up the cave, is he?" Dick's questions grew more anxious.

"Oh, he is fine now," declared Jimmy warmly. "He acted as if he liked Daddy, and Daddy likes him. He said so at lunch."

"Well, *that's* good." Dick spoke in a relieved voice. "Say, I've seen Nelson White and Merritt Wade and Charlie Newton. I've told 'em to be at the cave to-morrow morning at nine o'clock. They're going to see Raymond and Ned Blake and George Sterns. We've got to get busy. I'd like to play the Seven A fellows next week."

"John said you told him that Howard Myers wrote you a letter, and that it was about the team. If he thinks ——"

"Did he write me a letter? Hm-m! Well, maybe he didn't write me a daisy one!" interrupted Dick. He felt in the pocket of his knickers and drew forth a much-folded paper square. It was one long sheet of ruled paper, and had evidently been ripped from a ledger.

"It came in an envelope," Dick said as he unfolded the sheet, "but I threw that away. Let's go sit in the porch swing. I want to read it to you myself."

The three boys piled into the porch swing. Dick sat in the middle. John and Jimmy cast interested glances over Dick's shoulder as the freckle-faced boy smoothed out the long sheet. He laughed aloud as he read out the salutation:



“ YOU SMARTY OLD BOOB:

“ So you think you did something awful cute because you stole my clothes and pretty near made my father see me in a bathing suit. You are a fresh kid that is what you are and you ought to be put in jail for taking what didn't belong to you, even if you did give it back. If my suit would have fitted you maybe you might have kept it. Your father hasn't anything but an old ricketty hardware store so I guess you'd be glad to have some good clothes like mine. But just let me tell you that you are going to catch it from me the next time I see you. Now you and some more of those little, silly cry-babies you run with have a foolish idea that you can play ball. You're all no good players and the second primary grade could beat you without trying. I hate to challenge you, but the Six B fellows are very mad at you for what you did to me. They say they will play you even if you are a bunch of squall-babies. You've got to play them or I will get a constabule man to come to all your houses and put you all in a wagon and take you to the ball ground. You will have to play if the constabule man says so, or else you might have to go to prison for quite a while. So you better be ready to play the Six B fellows Friday afternoon on that big lot back of the school building. I am the captain of the Six B team and I know everything the way it ought to be. You don't

know anything but us Six fellows will show you a few little things about baseball. It will be fun to beat you and we will certainly hand you a hard wallop. It will make you cry and carry on awful. That will just make me laugh at you. I will have a deep revenge and that will be fine. You will know then it is a terrible thing for you to make me so mad as I am since you hurt my feelings down at the lake. You see that you get to the lot by two o'clock. I hope it don't rain, for I am crazy to see your team get beaten.

"Yours never forgetting what you did to me, smarty meany,

"HOWARD MYERS."

Dick finished the letter between a ripple of giggles. "I have to laugh hard every time I read it," he said. "It's a mean letter, but it's so funny—he, he!"

"He couldn't get a constable after us," laughed Jimmy. "He must think we are about three years old and easy to scare. We don't have to play his team because he says so. That's a queer way to challenge a team—for the Six B captain to say he'll have us arrested if we don't play his team."

"That's what I say, and I'm not going to answer Howard Myers' old letter." Dick was the

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captain of the Winners. "We'll see the fellows to-morrow morning at the cave. I'll read 'em this letter. I know they'll think the same as we do. We won't any of us go near the lot on Friday afternoon."

"If we don't go maybe he'll tell everyone that we are big babies and afraid of his team," declared John frowningly. "You said the Six B fellows were smaller than we are, all except Howard Myers."

"And that's the reason we ought not play them," argued Jimmy. "I don't care to play against smaller fellows. Besides, we wouldn't care to play any team that wouldn't give us a real challenge. We want to try to be as much like the big league players as we can." Jimmy had the greatest admiration for the league teams.

"I've told Frank Harding, he's the Seven A captain, that our team would play his team a week from Friday," Dick informed his chums. "He's going to send me a good challenge; written on a typewriter. That's the way to do things. Maybe I'll get it in the mail to-morrow morning." Dick looked briefly important.

"I wish we were going to play the Seven A fellows week after next," Jimmy said rather



wistfully. "Daddy's going to be home then, all that week. I'd like him to see our team work."

"So would I," echoed John. "We'll just have to beat the Seven As. Then maybe they'll challenge us to play another game the very next week and Daddy'd be home to see it."

"That's so," Dick nodded wisely. "Oh, we'll beat 'em! See if we don't."

The three chums talked happily over the Winners' bright prospects. They were sure of victory. John and Jimmy proudly showed Dick their new baseball outfit and took him down cellar to see the tennis set.

"Daddy's going to fix us a court when he comes home again. He hasn't time now. If we had one we couldn't play tennis much because we need to keep on practicing baseball. My gracious! We're busy about every minute of the time lately!" Jimmy exclaimed with a loud, happy sigh. "And the week Daddy's going to be home! Um-m-m! We're going to have a picnic at the lake and all you boys are coming to it. I'd like to have our circus, too. I wish you could come to Happy House every day, Dick. You ought to be right here to help us. You can be my assistant manager."

“I’ll come every day I can,” Dick loyally promised. He resolved to try to make his mother understand that the captain of the Winners and the assistant manager of a circus had duties to perform which must, of course, keep him away from home a good deal of the time.

A little while before dinner Mr. Hopkins took the boys for the promised drive on Lakeview Pike. Not only John and Jimmy, but Dick, too, missed Junior.

“I used to act like that, when I was real little,” Dick confessed, when John told him why Junior was missing from the party. “Once I poured a whole pail of water down a register and right onto a lady who came to see my mother. I was playing it was raining. My mother was *so* mad! She spanked me hard.”

Junior had spent a long day with no one but himself for company. His mother had brought him a light luncheon on a tray, but she would not stay in the room while he ate. All that gloriously sunshiny day he had to keep to his little blue bed and wear his sleeping suit. He mourned and cried most of the morning. In the afternoon he became sleepy enough to take his usual nap. At five o’clock, however, he sent up an earnest plea

of "Muvver, you please give me some clothes! Muvver, you please do! I are a good boy now!" Junior had counted the five strokes of the wall clock in the room and did not intend to miss dinner if he could help it.

At first his loud appeals for pardon met with no response, though they were heard out on the veranda where Mrs. Hopkins sat reading. He kept them up so diligently she decided to let him have the rest of the day with the family. So Junior came to the dinner table that evening, dressed in a spick and span white suit, his rosy face one glad smile. He beamed on everyone, his sorrows of the day forgotten. "I are always goin' to be a good boy," was his rash promise as Netta set his dessert before him. Junior had been given no dessert with his lunch that day. He was hungrily grateful to see it come his way that evening.

Dick stayed until half-past seven o'clock. The three chums practiced pitching and catching until the last minute before he went. Jimmy was the team's best pitcher, but Dick was next and John almost as skilful. Jimmy's pitching was remarkably clever for a boy of his age. Dick was full of bubbling admiration for him.



“ I tell you what, Jimmy,” he said, as Jimmy pocketed the ball and the trio of boys walked down to the gate, “ we could play fellows a lot bigger than we are and beat ’em. You’re the daisiest pitcher I ever saw. The Winners’ll win every game they play. I’m sorry for the Seven A boys. I like those kids. I almost wish we were going to play Howard Myers’ team. I guess we could show Howard what a real ‘ hard wallop ’ feels like.”

## CHAPTER VIII

### A FALSE ALARM

MERRITT WADE was the first cave dweller to report at the cave the next morning. It was only ten minutes past eight when he came running across the meadow. Soon afterward Ned Blake and Charlie Newton joined him. Dick was not long behind them. By half-past eight seven of the team had assembled. John and Jimmy had stopped for a morning romp with Mr. Hopkins. He had come out on the lawn in the big straw hat and both boys had playfully rushed him. They had agreed that morning "not to stay long at the cave, but come home and play around with Daddy." To-morrow he would be gone again from Happy House.

"Hallo-o-o!" Dick shouted through his hands, raised trumpet fashion, as he spied the brothers just entering the meadow. "We thought—you—were—never—coming."

"It's—not—nine—yet," Jimmy hallooed back.

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“We’re—not—late. You fellows—got—to—the—cave—too—soon.”

“Well, anyhow, we’re all here now,” said Dick with his cheerful grin as John and Jimmy joined the group standing near the cave’s entrance. “Let’s go into the cave and I’ll read you fellows Howard Myers’ letter. Oh, I forgot, we can’t. Our stuff’s over at Hopkins’. We haven’t a lantern or any boxes to sit on. We’ll have to go for our stuff first.”

It was a very different procession which crossed the meadow that morning from the one that had recently started for Happy House as exiles from their cherished cave. Dick found he could read Howard’s letter to them as they tramped along. The Winners greeted the fat boy’s brags and threats with hoots and yells of derision. They laughed and shouted and had a great deal of fun over it.

“I’d like to see any constable touch us,” scoffed Nelson White.

“Te, he, he,” tittered Dick. “That fatty spells it ‘constabule.’ I guess he doesn’t know everything, even if he says he does.”

The cave’s furnishings had been stored in the Hopkins’ garage. It did not take the Winners



long to shoulder their belongings and start back to the meadow. They hustled the cave furnishings joyfully into place and quickly disappeared into the cave after them. Raymond and George Sterns had not been inside the cave before and were delighted with it.

“I’m sorry we all forgot to bring something to eat, but it’s so soon after breakfast, probably we don’t need any eats,” Dick said as he set the lighted lantern on the center soap box with a proud flourish. “This is a baseball meeting anyway, and it has to be a business meeting. Now where do you think we ought to play the Seven As? I think this field is a good place, and we know Mr. Burton won’t care if we play here.”

“It’s better than the lot back of the school,” declared Charlie Newton. “Howard Myers would get up a gang of boys to come down and try to rattle us if we played there. He’ll be mad because we aren’t going to answer his challenge.”

The Winners had already agreed with Dick about not sending the malicious fat boy a reply to his unworthy letter.

“I haven’t any challenge yet from Frank Harding. It didn’t come in our mail yet. Maybe

he will put in it where he wants to play us. But if he says the lot back of the school I'll go and see him and tell him we don't care to play there. I won't write it in a letter." Dick was decided on that point. "I know a man who has a typewriter; so our answer'll be written on a typewriter, too."

"You fellows will have to come over here for practice every day until next Friday," Jimmy announced with an earnest nod. "We'll always come in the morning, and as many afternoons as we can. I'm not afraid we couldn't beat the Seven A fellows right now, but the harder we beat 'em the smarter we'll feel."

"What about our suits? We have to have 'em all alike." It was Raymond Alden who asked this important question.

"Umh!" groaned Dick. "I forgot all about suits. Course we'll have to have 'em. They have some baseball suits in the Lakeview Clothing Store. I saw 'em. Only we don't want to buy the same kind of suits that the other team has."

"Let's go and see them to-morrow, the bunch of us. If they are all right and different from the Seven As' suits we can find out how much

they cost and ask our folks to buy them for us," proposed Ned Blake.

"Hurrah! That's the way to do." Dick made a gesture of approval. "We are ——" He paused suddenly: "Hark! Listen to that!"

A quick silence settled upon the circle of boys. From the opposite side of the meadow rose the sound of loud voices. They grew still louder, as though their owners were drawing nearer the cave. The cave dwellers held their breath and listened. The voices belonged to boys.

"I'm going to ——" began John aloud.

"Sh-h-h!" Dick held a cautious finger to his lips. "Keep still as anything. I'm going to crawl part way out of the cave, so's I can see who they are. If I'm careful, maybe whoever they are won't see me." He dropped to his knees, almost flattened his wiry little body to the ground and began crawling slowly out of the cave.

The others watched him admiringly.

"That's the way Gray Cloud used to do in 'The Fort in the Forest,'" whispered Merritt to Jimmy.

Jimmy nodded. He was straining his ears to try to tell how far away the intruders were from the cave.



When Dick had reached a position where he could raise his head and catch a full view of the meadow he straightened up, inch by inch. The meadow grass was short and had been given some care. Mr. Burton had intended the wide rolling stretch of ground for a golf course. Thus he had seen to the care of it. The part of the meadow where the boys practiced baseball was almost the length of the field from the spot where they had dug the cave. Dick, braced by his hands, kept a fixed lookout for almost ten minutes.

“What’s the matter? Who is it? I don’t hear anybody talking now.” Nelson had grown impatient and had crawled up as near to Dick as the cave entrance would permit.

“It’s all right.” Dick drew a long breath of noisy relief and began wriggling backward into the cave. Nelson had either to go with him or be rolled on. “Well, that would have been a nice one on us if those fellows had come over here! That was Fatty Myers and his crowd!” he cried as he met a circle of inquiring eyes. “That fellow who drives the blue car and three real tall kids were with him. I don’t know who they were; not Fred Bates or Wallace Gray.”

“If they’d known where we were they’d have

pitched into us," was Nelson's opinion. "They'd have thought that with five big fellows in their crowd they could lick us."

"They didn't see us," Dick returned with satisfaction. "What I'm glad they didn't see is the cave. They must have just climbed the meadow fence when we first heard 'em talking. When I saw who it was they were about half-way across the field. They were hollering and playing tag like a lot of little bits of kids."

"That boy who has the blue car is Howard Myers' cousin. He's going to stay here until school begins." Raymond furnished this information. "He's about seventeen years old, but he goes around with Howard all the time. He drives his car too fast. My father says he'll be arrested if he doesn't stop it. He nearly ran over an old man yesterday."

"He almost bumped his car into ours, day before yesterday," put in Jimmy. "Do you suppose," he went on in a worried tone, "that those boys were looking for *us* over here? They might have heard we practiced here and came over to bother us. I wouldn't have cared for that, but I wouldn't want them to find the cave."

"If they did, they'd make a wreck of it," predicted Nelson.

"We'll have to make a cover for the mouth of it. I can make one of an old strawberry crate down in our back yard," planned resourceful Dick. "We can put grass in between the slats. Course we'll have to put fresh grass in every few days. But it will look like the rest of the field. I'll bring the new cover to-morrow. It will be fine, and those boys will never find our cave."

"Howard Myers has no business in this meadow," spoke up Charlie Merritt hotly. "Mr. Burton wouldn't want him to play here."

"Yes, but we wouldn't care to tell Mr. Burton on him," Nelson said quickly. "It was different when we told Mr. Burton what he did so as to help John."

The others agreed with Nelson in this. They were too self-reliant to wish to do anything but fight their own battles.

It was almost noon when the cave dwellers separated to go to their luncheon. Dick mournfully refused John's usual cordial invitation to lunch. "I told you yesterday that I'd have to go home to eat for a long while," he reminded. The other



boys had gone on. Dick had lingered at the gate to talk with his chums.

While they stood there a bright blue automobile whizzed suddenly out of Elm Avenue and into Preston Avenue, the street in which the Hopkins lived. It skimmed past them and on down the street, a brilliant blue streak on the yellow dirt road. The boys watched it interestedly and were surprised to see it begin to slow down. It went on a little farther, then the reckless driver turned it and brought it slowly back up the avenue.

"Hey, you!" greeted a familiar, but unpleasant, voice from the seat beside the driver. "Don't you know enough to answer a letter when you get one?" Howard Myers leaned far out of the car and tried to stare haughtily at the three boys. His idea of looking haughty was to pout his lips, thrust his chin forward and half shut his eyes. He did not look at all scornful. He looked very ridiculous.

"Did you think you were talking to me?" asked Dick in a tone of dry, boyish scorn. "If you did, my name's not 'Hey, you.' Try again. I might answer you."

"Go to it, Howard, and give him a trimming,"

suggested the boy at the wheel, his sulky-looking mouth breaking into a disagreeable smile. The two were the only occupants of the blue car. They had left their three companions of the meadow.

"Yes, that's what I'll do." Howard made a threatening movement as though to get out of the car and attack Dick. He did not set foot out of it, however. He was not anxious to tackle the three sturdy youngsters who stood eyeing him steadily.

"Go to it. Go to it," again urged his cousin. "You can whip all three of those infants." He did not intend to help, but to watch the fight.

"Oh, I'd hate to hurt the poor little things," jeered Howard. "Wait till our team beats their baby team clear off the field, then I'll tend to these kiddies."

This was too much for Dick. He had not intended even to say to Howard Myers that he had received the fat boy's letter. Now he was so outraged he sputtered forth: "If you think I'd answer a letter like the one you sent me, you think wrong. You say we're babies. We're bigger than the Six B boys on your team. I don't see how *you* ever were made captain of it. Anyway,

we're too big to play Six B, and we're not going to do it. Why don't you join a team your own size?"

"You don't know what you're talking about." Howard's fat face was scarlet with anger. "I've—well—I've made some changes in my team. Ahem! I'm going to make some more. My team isn't Six B any more. It's named the—the"—Howard had to stop to think up a name—"the Great Little Players. *That's* the name of my team."

"Well, I don't care what it is. I'm captain of the Winners and we don't want to play you. *That's all.*" Dick turned his back squarely on Howard. "Good-bye, boys," he said to John and Jimmy. "I've got to hustle home to my lunch." He started up the street without the slightest glance at the boys in the car. John and Jimmy also took no notice of Howard, but went up their own drive to the house.

"You're a simpleton," was the opinion of Howard's cousin. "Why are you so crazy to play those kids you can't take 'no' for an answer?"

"Because I owe 'em one for something they did to me. I've a team picked out that will help me



pay 'em back." Howard's face darkened. "I am so mad at that smarty Dick Carter I wrote him a very strong letter. That's why he says he won't let his team play my team. I guess I made a mistake doing that. I could have written him a real mean letter some other time."

"You're a bright captain of a team," jeered the other boy. "You don't know where you are at. Why didn't you pitch into that fresh freckle-face, as I told you to do? You said you were going to."

"Well—er—I changed my mind," stammered Howard.

"Oh, ha, ha! You were afraid, you mean." His cousin, Gerald Jones, could be as disagreeable as Howard himself when he chose to be.

"That's what *you* say," flung back Howard. "If I'd fought him, course I would have licked him. Then he'd *never* let his team play mine. I'm going to send him another challenge; just as if I hadn't sent any. This will be a good one, and quite polite."

"You'd better let me write it for you. You'll make a mess of it." His cousin laughed at him again. "I don't believe you know how to be polite."

“ Oh, is that so? Well, I don’t think you do, either,” snapped Howard. “ I wouldn’t want an old challenge that you’d made up. It would be no good. I’ll ask my father how to write one. He knows more about baseball than you. He likes me to be captain of a team.”

As he made this triumphant retort a very pleasing idea came to him. Howard was sure he had thought of a way to make Dick give in and let his team play against the Great Little Players.

## CHAPTER IX

### A NEW KIND OF SONG

THE next week was a busy one for the Winners. Early on Monday morning they met at Dick's father's store and trooped over to the Lakeview Clothing Store in search of suitable uniforms.

"The Seven A fellows have yellow suits with red on 'em," was Dick's helpful information as they entered the clothing store. "Their mothers made 'em last summer when they were just starting to be a team."

"Then we don't want *that* kind of suits," said Charlie Merritt. "White ones wouldn't be much good, either. We're always tumbling around, and they'd show the dirt."

"Have you any baseball uniforms?" Jimmy eagerly asked the owner of the shop, a small thin man with spectacles. He had come from the back of the store to meet the boys.



"I certainly have," was the cheering reply. "I've some fine gray ones that came in just last night. I was going to put them out on a counter this very morning."

The youngsters' eyes sparkled as the man brought out a number of the suits for them to see. They were made of a rather cheap-looking, but attractive gray material, and consisted of blouse and knickers. Five dollars each was the price he asked for them. The team looked a little solemn at this figure, but each resolved to go home and plead hard for the money with which to buy them.

"I know Mother'll let us have them," John said confidently. "I'll ask her to put some blue stripes on the sleeves and up and down the knickers, and a big blue 'W' on the front of the blouses. I mean for all of us, not just on Jimmy's suit and mine."

"Will you please put nine suits away for us? We'll come back and buy them to-day or to-morrow." Dick tried to make his tones very business-like.

"Yes, if you boys are sure you want them. If you don't come for them by to-morrow afternoon at three o'clock out they go on the counter."

The little man peered shrewdly at the lads over his spectacles as he began counting out the nine suits. He had not been in business long in Lakeview and had not much faith in his boyish customers.

"Gee!" exclaimed Dick as soon as they were again in the street. "Those suits cost money. Let's try to get the cash for 'em this afternoon. Then we'll be sure of 'em. They are pretty nice. When we have the blue stripes they will be nicer. What we must do now is get the five dollars apiece."

Greatly to their satisfaction the Winners had not much trouble raising the necessary five dollars apiece. By three o'clock that afternoon the Carters' telephone had rung seven times. "We've got it," was the joyful message one after another of the Winners sent their captain over the 'phone. "We'll be at the store right away."

With the problem of uniforms so easily solved practice went on more diligently than ever. Dick had received and replied to the Seven As' challenge. The A boys had named the lot behind the school as the place for the game. Dick had to go and see Frank Harding and arrange to use the meadow as a ball field instead. He found

he had so much to do as manager of the team he had no time to go to the movies.

Mrs. Hopkins had insisted that Jimmy should write Mr. Burton a note asking him if he had any objection to the boys using the meadow in which to play ball. She pointed out to her sons that while they had been allowed to keep the cave, nothing had been said in regard to playing ball there. Neither John nor Jimmy had thought to ask him for permission on the morning of his call.

Mr. Burton wrote a short kindly note of reply. The Winners were at liberty to use the meadow as long as they pleased. He hoped some day to take time to see them play. He enjoyed a good game of ball. This friendly message gave the Winners a pleasant opinion of themselves as ball players. The Seven A boys would stand no chance when they came to the bat.

The evening before the day of the game John and Jimmy watched the sun set with anxious eyes. It dropped down clear and red, leaving long trails of delicate pink across the sky. There was hardly a cloud to be seen. Jimmy declared that to-morrow would surely be a fine day.

The brothers were up with the sun next morn-



ing. They were so eager to take a look at the sky that they both rushed to the same window and bumped their heads together.

"My, but your head's hard!" John exclaimed, rubbing his own ruefully.

"That's what I was thinking about yours," giggled Jimmy. "It isn't going to rain a drop to-day; and it isn't hot, either. It's just right for our game."

"Do you suppose people will come to watch us play?" asked John. "Dick says that lots of people come when there's a game on the lot back of the school."

"That's because so many games of ball have been played there. Most people don't know about this meadow, you see. I'm glad of it. I'd rather have just our teams and the umpire there. We can play better ball. But I suppose a few boys will know we're going to play and want to see us work." Jimmy loved the game for itself. He did not care about baseball fans.

The Winners had craftily agreed not to go near the cave after they reached the meadow that afternoon. Dick had made a slatted square from a strawberry crate which just fitted over the

cave's entrance. He had filled the open spaces of the square with small green sods and jammed the cover firmly down over the opening. He had then arranged more grass sods around it. As a final touch of secrecy he had brought armfuls of brush and scattered it over the square.

It had taken him half the previous afternoon to do all this, but he was proud of the result. "Nobody'll care to go walking through a brush heap," he had gleefully declared. "People always walk away around 'em."

The game was set for two o'clock, but both teams were on the ground by half-past one. Alfred Harding, Frank's older brother, a high school senior was to act as umpire. The Seven A boys had been promoted to that class at the close of school just as Dick and his chums had been promoted from Seven A to Eight B. Each set of boys proudly used their new rank.

The contesting teams were on the very best terms. The A boys had challenged the Winners, so they felt that they ought to show them every courtesy. The Winners had been allowed the choice of the playing field, so they felt that the other boys were their guests.

The Winners came to the bat first. The two

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teams made a colorful showing in their yellow and gray suits with respective red and blue trimmings. About a dozen small girls wandered into the field to watch the play. There were at least twenty boys, anywhere from eight to fourteen, gathered in a straggling group as near to the diamond as they could go and still be out of the way of the ball.

Nelson was first batsman. Whenever he hit the ball he would send it a long way, but he seldom hit it. He missed on two strikes, but on the third he batted the ball through the air, and far out to right field. By the time it was back again Nelson was running for third base which he made just a second before the ball reached him. Dick came next and made first base on a hit. At the end of their first inning the Winners had three runs to their credit and a number of base hits. They had practiced faithfully and they found the A pitcher's balls easy to hit after a try or two at them.

The A boys did not find Jimmy's clever pitching easy to get used to. The ball looked easy enough to hit as it came soaring through the air, but somehow the A batsmen always missed it. They were plucky boys and good runners. In-



stead of growing sulky when they did not score they cheerfully kept on trying. By the time six innings had been played the Winners' score promised to be a truly winning one.

The game lasted two hours and the last inning was the hardest fought of all. The A boys knew they were already beaten but they wanted to do their best with their score until the very last minute. After the game they shook hands with the Winners and made almost as much good-natured noise as though they had won the game. They gathered admiringly around Jimmy and asked him plenty of questions about his pitching. Even Alfred Harding, the umpire, told him he was "some classy little pitcher."

"This will be a splendid diamond after you've played a few more games on it," Harding told the Winners. "Who owns this meadow?" He glanced at Dick rather suspiciously. He knew Dick's reputation for mischief.

"The Winners pretty near own it," Dick replied, then smiled roguishly. "I was only funning," he said in the next breath. "It belongs to Mr. Burton, and he gave permission to play ball here. He's coming to see us play some day."

Alfred gave a long whistle of surprise. "You're a bunch of lucky kids," he said, "to be on the right side of *him*. He owns about half of Lakeview. He ——"

A burst of whoops and yells suddenly rose from the north side of the meadow. A number of boys had vaulted the fence and were running toward the ball players. They were led by Howard Myers who was putting forth all his strength in order to keep at the head of the crowd. Howard was too stout and ungainly to be a swift runner, though he thought he was.

"What's—the—matter—here?" he panted, addressing Frank Harding. "What—are—you—kids—quitting—for? We—came to—see the game. We couldn't—find—out where it was."

Only that morning Howard had heard of the game. He supposed it would be played on the lot behind the school. He had coaxed his cousin Gerald to take him around Lakeview in the blue roadster so that he could spread the news of the game to his team and the few other boys who were friendly with him. He glibly gave out the hour for the game as at two o'clock. When at that time he and his party arrived at the lot all ready

to "tease and rattle those babies" they found not a person there.

As leader of the "teasing" party Howard had to walk with his companions. For two long hours they tramped about Lakeview without finding out where the game was being played. They finally passed the meadow by chance where the teams had still lingered to talk.

"Game's over," Frank said shortly. "We're going home now."

"Oh, see here," Howard began patronizingly, "you needn't be afraid of us. We didn't come here to fight you A fellows. We want to see you play. Go ahead and start another inning. I hope you whitewashed them." Howard jerked his thumb contemptuously toward the Winners who had drawn off a little by themselves when the crowd of boys had appeared.

"No; they beat us," one of the A boys announced loudly, "and we aren't afraid of you, Mr. Howard Fatty Myers, or your crowd. The game's over. Do you get that?"

Several of Howard's companions now came to his support. Among them were Wallace Gray and Fred Bates. They began to mimic the boy who had answered Howard so boldly.



Dick nudged Nelson White who stood next to him. "Start a noise song," he whispered. "You and I'll begin. All the fellows, even the As, will know what to do. Don't you remember how we used to yell 'em silly last year, whenever that gang started to tease us? I don't want to keep yelling mean things back at 'em, and that's what they are trying to make us do. All ready; now!" Dick raised his treble voice in a shrill, terrifying screech. Nelson followed his example.

Within five seconds afterward the Winners and the A boys were gleefully helping the noise song along. Howls, hoots, shrieks, long-drawn wails and the shrillest of screeches combined in an uproar created at the top of boyish lungs. Each boy used his willing strength to raise the cry he could make with the greatest amount of noise. The harder Howard and his friends tried to make themselves heard the louder the noise singers yelled. Even Alfred Harding helped the noise song along.

"Let's keep on singing and just walk off and leave 'em," John proposed to Dick between screeches. Dick nodded in the middle of a piercing wail and John passed the word to Merritt who was at his left. It went on to the others.

In the midst of a hubbub which a band of South Sea savages might never hope to outdo the congenial teams suddenly faced about and started across the meadow.

"Here, you kids; you come back. I'm not half through with you yet," roared Howard. Not even his own party could hear him on account of the din made by the departing ball players. Dick's delighted choristers kept on going, enjoying themselves hugely with each fresh howl.

"Oh, say, what was the matter with us?" exclaimed Fred Bates in disgust. The noise singers were just vaulting the meadow fence. "We could have licked that bunch with one hand. Why didn't you start something, Howard?"

"I didn't want to start anything," Howard answered sharply. "After we play both those teams and beat 'em all to nothing, *then* we'll show 'em where they belong, if they act fresh. I know how I can make them both play our team. I've thought of something else, too. I'll show those squawkers they can't make fun of us and not get paid back for it."

## CHAPTER X

### A SCHEME THAT FAILED

HOWARD hustled his party out of the meadow and left them at the first corner below it. He was anxious to get home and put his new idea into execution. For a wonder he had not done anything that afternoon which he had been forbidden to do. He walked boldly through the front gate and strolled up the long stone walk to the house wearing his most innocent expression. His father sat on the veranda reading and Howard went briskly up the steps, taking care that his father should notice him.

“Well, sir!” Mr. Myers looked sharply up from his book. His glance rested half suspiciously on Howard. “Where have you been?”

“Over to a ball field,” Howard glibly replied. “Say, Pa, will you help me about something? It’s something I want to have *just right*. You can do it better than anyone else can.”

“What is it, my son; what is it?” Mr. Myers



looked rather pleased. To see Howard usually meant to scold him for some mischief he had done. This was a most agreeable change.

"You see, I'm the captain of a baseball team; the Great Little Players," Howard began importantly. "Our team wants to challenge another team to play. The boys in it are so fr——" Howard checked the "fresh." His father always lectured him when he used slang. "I—that is—they aren't very polite to our team. So our team wants to send 'em the best kind of a challenge to show 'em we know more about what's polite than they do."

"I see. That's not a bad idea. Who are these boys on the other team?"

"Oh, Dick Carter, Nelson White, Ray Alden, and some others like them." Howard took care not to mention John's or Jimmy's names. He knew his father had liked Jimmy at sight.

Mr. Myers frowned slightly. He knew of Dick and Nelson and rated them both as a pair of young mischiefs.

"I wish you'd write it for me. I can ——"

"No; my boy, I will dictate it to you, but you must write it yourself. It will be good practice for you. There's a pad of scratch paper on the

library table. Go and get it." Mr. Myers' severe features softened.

Howard lumbered into the house for the pad of paper. He came back, drew a porch chair close to his father's chair and opened his fountain pen with a flourish.

"Let me see. What are the names of the teams? When and where is the game to be, and at what time of day?"

"I can't say I admire either name," he criticized when Howard told him. "Now; all ready for dictation." Mr. Myers was really enjoying being helpful to his usually disobedient son.

"The—ahem—Great Little Players have the honor to challenge the Winners' baseball team to a game of baseball on the afternoon of Thursday, August twenty-fourth, at half-past two o'clock on the ball ground directly in the rear of Lakeview school. A prompt response to the challenge will be appreciated."

Mr. Myers knew a great deal more about the banking business than he did about baseball. He was not, nor had ever been, a baseball fan. He humored Howard's request because he wanted his son to take an interest in outdoor sports. Howard was a good deal fonder of rid-

ing in an automobile than he was of running and playing like other boys of his own age.

"Oh, Pa, that's *fine*," Howard praised. "I guess that will make those fellows want to play us. I think they ought to want to, don't you?"

"I can see no reason why they should refuse. You say they have played against other school teams. One team should be considered as good as another. There should be no hard feeling in the playing of games."

"That's just what I think." Now that he had obtained what he wished Howard was ready to go. Luckily for him his father was also ready to resume his book, so Howard escaped at once. He went into the house and up the stairs to his room, a smile of malicious triumph on his fat face. He still had another plan to carry out as soon as his father should leave the veranda. He was sitting at a point on the veranda nearest the reception hall. There the telephone stood, and Howard was waiting his chance to use it.

While he waited Howard copied the challenge on a sheet of expensive gray note paper which he took from his mother's desk. He spoiled eight sheets of paper before he wrote one to suit him.

No chance came to use the 'phone until after



dinner that night. Then his father drove away in the roadster. His mother had been away at the seashore for a month and would not be home for two more weeks. Howard had things all to himself. He hustled to the telephone, looked up a number and called it.

"Hello," he said as the person at the other end of the line answered. "Is this Mr. Burton?" Howard tried to talk in deep tones, but was not very successful.

"Yes," boomed a big voice in return. "This is Mr. Burton. Who's talking?"

"This is a friend," Howard made cautious reply. "Er—I wanted to tell you that your meadow right near the south end of Preston Avenue is all torn up. A lot of bad boys are playing ball there and carrying on *so noisy*. I thought you would want to know it. If I was you I'd send a constabule up and have him scare them off. It's too bad ——"

Click! Up went the receiver, leaving Howard to stare open-mouthed. Mr. Burton had cut him off! Howard decided that "old grouch" Burton was "awful" mad because the boys had torn up the meadow. Howard didn't care because he had been cut off on the telephone. He had raised

trouble for the boys he did not like. That satisfied him. He took two or three clumsy skips about the hall, laughing and snapping his fingers. Crosspatch Burton would soon "get after"Smarty Dick Carter and his crowd.

Ting-a-ling-a-ling! Howard had started for the kitchen to help himself to a third piece of cake since dinner. He came back to the hall and took up the telephone. "Hello; hello," called a girl's voice.

"Hello; who's talking?" demanded Howard briskly. "This is Charles J. Myers' residence."

"Is Howard Myers there?" came the quick return.

"Yes, indeed." Howard spoke very pompously. "This is Mister Howard Myers speaking." He tried to give an imitation of his father at the 'phone.

"Go ahead. There's your party," he heard the girl say. Then followed an angrily roared "A-h-h-h! Just as I thought."

"Get off the line," ordered Howard rudely. He thought someone had suddenly cut in. "What's the matter with you?"

"You'll soon find out what's the matter, you young scapegrace, if ever you call me on the

'phone again and go to telling tales about other boys; especially fine boys who know how to mind their own business. Now understand I gave those same boys my permission to use that meadow for a ball ground. They're welcome to it. But let me catch *you* or any of the young rascals you run with over there and I'll see you don't go there a second time. Remember that." Click, and Mr. Burton was gone.

"Wh-wha-t, how—who," stammered Howard. He looked a trifle dazed. "How did he know who I was so as he could call me up?" He still stood with the receiver to his ear. He angrily slammed it on its hook and went pouting to the veranda. One of his plans had failed. He had been so sure that Mr. Burton would "get after" Dick and his chums.

It had not been hard for Mr. Burton to locate the mysterious informer. When Howard first spoke on the telephone he formed a shrewd suspicion as to his identity. He had only to question the operator to learn whence the call had come. In a small town like Lakeview such calls were easily traced.

If there had been more members of the Myers family than himself, his father and mother.



Howard might not have been so lawless. His mother was fond of society and allowed him to do as he pleased. His father was too much occupied with business to keep the right kind of watchful eye on his son. He punished Howard severely whenever he caught him doing wrong. Howard had learned to keep cleverly out of his father's way when in mischief, which saved him many a whipping.

Howard had been forbidden to leave the Myers premises in the evening after seven o'clock while his mother was away. He could not wait until next day to mail the challenge. The post-office was closed, but he could mail the challenge in the box in front of the building. He also planned to stop at the drug store for ice-cream. He would walk down to the lower end of the garden and slip quickly through the fence. It would be easy to deceive the cook and the maid who had been ordered to watch him. His cousin Gerald had gone away that afternoon to spend a few days with another cousin. Howard was glad of that. He and Gerald squabbled continually.

He managed to get away from the house unseen and was soon hurrying toward the business part of Lakeview. He did not know how long

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his father might be gone. He dropped the envelope into the mail-box with an "Uh!" of satisfaction. He then steered for the drug store. He had already decided on chocolate and pineapple ice-cream.

While he sat on a high stool at the soda fountain eating ice-cream with zest, he happened to glance out the door. He gave a frightened start which nearly toppled him off the stool. His father was just parking the gray roadster in front of the drug store. He dropped his spoon with a clang and bolted for a door at the rear of the store which led out to a side street. He had already paid for the ice-cream so the girl at the fountain paid no attention to his sudden flight.

Howard set off up the street, running as he had not run for a long time. He soon began to puff and pant and grow redder and redder in the face, but he kept on going. He tumbled through a gap he had purposely made in the Myers' fence and reached the middle of the garden just as his father drove the roadster through the gateway. Howard stood still among the rows of blooming dahlias until his father drove up to the garage. He was breathing loudly, but managed to say: "Hello, Pa. This is a fine night, isn't it?"

“Very fine, indeed. Be careful when you walk among those dahlias not to step on them,” his father added, not quite pleased to find Howard there.

“Oh, I’m always careful about ’em,” Howard replied cheerfully. He knew his father had not caught a glimpse of him in the drug store. He walked toward the house, chuckling to himself. “That’s one more time I fooled Pa,” he was thinking. “I guess I’m about three times as smart as Dick Carter. I’m smart, but I’m no smarty like he is.”



## CHAPTER XI

### THE BOYS WHO WEREN'T MEAN

"OH, rats 'n' bob-tailed cats!" exclaimed Dick Carter disgustedly as his mother handed him a letter at the breakfast table next morning. "I don't want a letter from that old fatty!"

"You don't seem to prize your correspondent very highly, Dick," his mother said, smiling. This was the second letter she had given him in the same handwriting.

"I don't prize him at all. It's Howard Myers," was Dick's half grumbling reply. "Please, Mother, may I go up to the cave this morning? May I go right now? I can stop at Happy House for John and Jimmy and we can call the rest of the boys on the 'phone. I *have* to go, Mother. I'm the manager, you know, and ——"

"Yes, I know." Mrs. Carter had been reminded two or three times a day for several weeks of this fact. "Well, manager or not, come home

for lunch. I'm still the manager of you, Dickie," she slyly added.

Dick laughed, dropped a kiss on his mother's brown hair and scudded from the dining-room. He gave a cheery little whoop as he ran down the long flight of steps and raced for Happy House. He carried Howard's letter, still unopened. He wished to wait until John and Jimmy could share its contents with him.

Dick opened the gate and dashed into the yard, trying to look in all directions at once for his chums. The sound of rapidly played scales told him that John was doing his hour's practice. Jimmy was at the upper end of his garden gathering lima beans. Junior was in the side yard playing with Tip. He would throw a stick as far as he could, and Tip would never fail to retrieve it. Each time that Tip brought back the stick to Junior, he was given a bit of cake from a slice in Junior's hand.

"Oo-oo-ee," thrilled Dick. Jimmy heard and almost dropped the basket of beans he was holding. So did John. The scales stopped suddenly and John came bouncing out on the veranda.

"Got something." Dick waved the letter in the air.

The three collided at the steps with a bump which set them all laughing. They promptly climbed into the porch swing, their favorite seat, to learn what Howard Myers had to say this time.

Dick read the challenge aloud, and slowly. Howard had not meddled with the wording of it. It was just as his father had dictated to him. Underneath, however, he had seen fit to add a few sentences of his own.

“Dictated by Mister Charles J. Myers and written by his son, Mister Howard Myers,” Dick read, then gave a scornful sniff. “My father says that you don’t act very nice when you will play other teams but you won’t play mine. He says my team is as good as any other team. He says when you are playing games you shouldn’t think about being mad all the time. I am still very mad at you, Dick Carter, but I won’t think of it for a while. My father thinks you are all very mean.

“Yours, not mad at you for a while,  
“HOWARD MYERS.”

“What do you think of that?” Dick’s blue eyes were showing angry sparks. “I guess Mr. Myers doesn’t know how mean Howard’s been



to us. I'll bet Howard never told him about that. He wouldn't dare. His father tries to make him be square, but he can't."

"Mr. Myers is a nice man," Jimmy said very soberly. He was thinking of the day when Sunshine had caught the rat in the Myers' chicken yard. Since that eventful day he had met Mr. Myers several times in the street. The bank president had always spoken to him pleasantly.

"Well, we don't have to play Howard Myers' team because his father says so." John spoke defiantly. "Maybe his father said a little and Howard made up the rest."

"But Mr. Myers wrote the challenge, because Howard couldn't write one like that," Jimmy pointed out. "Maybe he thinks it's a good thing for Howard to be captain of a team and play ball. Then, of course, he'd want Howard's team to play a lot of games of ball."

"See here," Dick cried, "you don't want the Winners to play his team, do you?" His merry face clouded.

"I don't know." Jimmy looked doubtful. "Maybe we ought to, just to show his father that we aren't mean; that we aren't thinking about being mad all the time."

“ Oh, I s’pose we could play the fatty one game,” Dick said grudgingly. “ If we won it, he wouldn’t want to play us again. If he won, he wouldn’t want to play us again for fear he’d lose the second game. He’d want always to tell around school that his team beat ours. I don’t know who’s in his team—not any of the Six B kids.”

“ Nelson said he heard Howard Myers had some quite big fellows in his team,” declared John. “ They’ve been practicing over in Fred Bates’s yard.”

“ Huh! I don’t know who they can be,” Dick said disdainfully. “ Don’t care. Let’s go and call up the boys and hustle ’em to the cave. If they don’t want to play Fatty, then it’s six against three, and we don’t play him. I’d just as soon to please you, Jimmy.” Dick had great respect for Jimmy’s fair ways.

“ We’ll answer the challenge, anyhow. I’ll get some paper and take my fountain pen along. You go to the kitchen, John, and see if Netta will give you some ginger cake. She made four big pans of it yesterday.”

It took fully twenty minutes to get in touch with the missing Winners. Once they had re-

ceived the call it did not take them ten to reach the meadow. They came over the meadow fence from all directions. By the time they arrived Dick had removed the brush heap and the slatted square. He was careful to lay the brush beside the opening and his nimble fingers pulled the square fairly well into place, working from the inside.

John had luckily run across his mother in the kitchen and had begged a whole ginger cake from her. The Winners ate the toothsome, old-fashioned sweet and talked long and earnestly about the challenge. Nelson, Ned and Charlie were strongly against playing Howard's team. They gave in after a time. Dick had decided that Jimmy was in the right, so he was all for accepting the challenge. Nelson was the best writer among them. He made the final copy of the challenge which John composed with Dick's help. It was short and to the point:

“The Winners accept the challenge of the Great Little Players and will play them a game of ball on the afternoon of Thursday, August twenty-fourth, at half-past two, but not on the lot behind the school. The Winners will play on the meadow diamond, on Preston Avenue. It



belongs to Mr. Elwood Burton. The Winners have his permission to use it.

“RICHARD GRANT CARTER,  
*Manager of the Winners.*”

It had taken so long to call the Winners together, write the challenge and finish the ginger cake that it was noon when they emerged from the cave. They scattered, trotting conscientiously home to luncheon, though none of them were hungry. Dick was so afraid of being late to his lunch he scampered home cross lots.

As Jimmy and John reached their own gate they saw Junior outside it, hopping in a little circle around what looked like a large dark spot.

“Hey, there, Junie, what are you doing outside the gate?” called out John. “What have you got there?”

“Whee-oo-ee!” cheered Junior, prancing harder than ever. “This are a crab, Johnny; a great big crab; only he don’t have any legs. I don’t go too close. I don’t let him pinch me.”

“A crab!” John began to laugh. “Oh, Junie, *that’s* not a crab. Look, Jimmy, it’s a turtle; a big one, too. How do you suppose he ever came here?”

"I guess he went out for a walk and got lost," laughed Jimmy. "Anyhow let's keep him. He'll be fine for our circus menagerie. We can put some water in a rain barrel in the back yard and keep him there. We'll have to cover the top with an open kind of cover or he'll climb out and go away."

"How are you, Mr. Turtle?" John lightly poked the turtle with the toe of his shoe. It suddenly ran out its head at him and snapped. "Wow!" John drew back his foot in a hurry. "Look out for him, Junie," he warned. "If he snaps you, he'll hang on harder than a crab could. How are you going to get him to the back yard, Jimmy?"

Jimmy surveyed the dusty looking traveler. "I'll get the wheelbarrow and the big snow shovel. I'll shovel him up and dump him on the barrow. Watch him, John, so he doesn't get away." Jimmy was off to the garage for Mr. Turtle's moving van. He soon came rattling down the drive, the shovel bumping noisily against the barrow.

Jimmy placed the shovel squarely in front of their unexpected visitor and John gently poked him with a stick. He was assisted to the shovel

without much balking. While they were busy with Mr. Turtle old Jabez came down the drive.

"I clar fer gracious, ef that ain't a turkle!" he exclaimed. "Lots o' turkles down south, chilluns; lots o' 'em. I know'd a ole Spanish gemmun, once. He had one of 'em fer a pet. Landy, it war five times 's big's that one. He done come frum South Americky, an' he done call that air turkle, Bolivar. He done say, Bolivar wuz a big man in his country long time ago. This turkle he done know his name when his massa call him."

"That was a funny name; but it sounds pretty good," John said. "I read in a natural history book that turtles travel hundreds of miles. This might be a Spanish turtle, too."

"More likely he done come from de lake. I done seen a turkle there, onct in a while," returned Jabez. He made a quick movement and turned the turtle over in the barrow. Junior laughed and clapped his hands. This pleased Jabez, who adored Junior. He tickled the turtle's feet and teased him a little, then he turned him back again and went on.

"What are you going to call your turtle,



Junie?" Jimmy took up the handles of the wheelbarrow. "He's yours. You found him."

"He are *not* my turkle." Junior said "turkle" the same as Jabez. "I don't like him. He are a cross old thing."

"Let me have him, then. You have Doodle, and Jimmy owns Sunny and Taffy. I'd like this fellow for a pet." John reached down and touched the turtle's tough shell as Jimmy wheeled the barrow up the drive. "I'll call him Bolivar. That's a fine name. I can call him Bolly for short. I'll teach him to know his name, if I can."

Jimmy made fun of "Bolivar" as a name for John's new pet. John had his mind set on it, however, so Bolivar became a member of the Happy House menagerie. He had to stay in the wheelbarrow while his rain-barrel house was rolled into place near a corner of the back porch. Jimmy next took the hose and filled the barrel a little over half full of water from a hydrant in the yard. Bolivar took one more short ride on the snow shovel and landed in his new home with a splash. He dived to the bottom of the barrel at once. The feel of the cool water was very pleasant.

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John leaned far over the barrel, peering down at his new pet. "Here, Bolivar, Bolivar!" he called over and over again. Jimmy lifted Junior up so that he could see into the barrel, and Junior said, "Come, Bulvider, Bulvider!" But Bolivar stayed at the bottom of the barrel. He had yet to learn that he had become a turtle of real importance.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE PICNIC

THE three Js expected their father home on Monday, but he surprised them by arriving at Happy House in a taxicab on Saturday morning.

“Hurrah, hurray!” John rejoiced as he saw his father step out of the taxicab and come hurrying up the walk. John had just finished his breakfast and was going out to regale Bolivar with a piece of bread and two salad leaves. He shouted toward the dining-room, over his shoulder: “Hi, Jimmy, Daddy’s home!” and dashed to meet his father, tucking Bolivar’s refreshments in his knickers pocket as he ran.

“And are you going to be home two more days longer than you thought you could?” he eagerly asked, after he had hugged his father like a young bear.

“Yes; I did some hard hustling and covered the last of my territory yesterday so as to be home earlier.” Mr. Hopkins began to laugh as Junior,



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Jimmy and Mrs. Hopkins came hurrying from the house to meet him. All three pounced upon him at once in an affectionate greeting.

"Did the expressman deliver a large package here this week?" Mr. Hopkins inquired of the three Js in general. He was now in the dining-room eating what he called a "real breakfast" of which hot waffles and syrup were the feature. The happy youngsters had found they could each eat "one more hot waffle" with Father. Junior called them "awfuls" and had eaten six at the first breakfast.

"We didn't see any," Jimmy answered. "Maybe he did, and Mother is keeping it put away for a surprise."

"No, she isn't, though she knows what's in the package. It will probably be here to-day or early next week. Want to know what it is?"

"I don't," Jimmy said quickly. "I'm so used to surprises I like 'em better than knowing all about something before it happens."

"So do I," agreed John.

"So are I," Junior declared grandly as he deluged an "awful" with syrup.

"What's become of your curiosity bumps?" Mr. Hopkins raised surprised brows.

"I guess we lost 'em somewhere around the house," John chuckled softly. "We'll probably find 'em again before long."

"You please take me out in the car this afternoon, Daddy?" coaxed Junior, turning an appealing, syrup-streaked face to his father.

"No, my little boy; not this afternoon. Daddy is going to work among his dahlias. We'll go out for a ride this evening after dinner. You may come and help me pick a great big bunch of dahlias for Mother if you like."

"Can't we have the picnic down at the lake on Tuesday?" John spoke eagerly. "'Cause on Thursday we're going to play ball and we want you to see the game, and Saturday"—he glanced inquiringly at Jimmy—"we'll have the circus, maybe. You have to go to that, too, only it's going to be on this lot."

"I see. It doesn't look as though I'd get much sweet rest, does it?" teased Mr. Hopkins. "All kinds of happy happenings are going to happen at Happy House, or near it, which is just the same. We'll have our picnic Tuesday."

"Having a good time all the time you're home 'll be better than just having a rest," John argued stoutly.

“Um-m-m; maybe.” Mr. Hopkins tried to look doubtful, but laughed instead. The three Js accepted the laugh as a signal for a romp. They surrounded him as he started to leave the dining-room and made him fight his way to the veranda. From there they fondly escorted him out to see Bolivar.

By three o'clock that afternoon the other seven members of the Winners had been invited to the picnic and had instantly accepted the invitation. Jimmy and John took turns at the telephone inviting their chums. “Be at Happy House at nine o'clock Tuesday morning, and tell your folks you won't be home until it's almost dark,” were the pleasant instructions the brothers gave out.

On Monday morning the express package came. It was a gaily striped tent of fairly good size. Mr. Hopkins had heard so many rumors of the coming circus, he knew the youngsters would prize this treasure. He also bought it with intent to take it along to the picnic to use as a dressing tent.

“You don't have to come to Happy House in your bathing suits,” the two Js proudly told their guests. “My father is going to take a tent along for us. Just bring your bathing suits with you,



but not anything to eat. We'll have all the things to eat for you."

John and Jimmy could hardly believe their good fortune when first they saw the tent. They had been wondering if they could make one of poles and sheets that would do for a side-show. The main performance was to be in the open air; so was the menagerie. They wished to charge one cent extra for the side-show. This could not be done unless the features were under cover. It seemed as though Daddy always did nice things for them at exactly the right time.

Tuesday morning came at last, sparkling and sunny with a light flutter of breeze. Junior was first awake at Happy House. It was only a little past five o'clock, but he sat up in bed and hailed the day with such a loud burst of song he woke everyone else up. Mrs. Hopkins said that, for once, it was a good thing.

Mr. Hopkins had hired a light truck on which to put the tent, a canoe which he owned and the three heavy hampers of eatables. He drove the truck and Mrs. Hopkins the roadster. Raymond, Dick, Merritt and Ned Blake rode with her and Junior and Netta in the automobile. Jimmy, John, Nelson, George and Charlie New-

ton stowed themselves gleefully into the truck. Junior sat beside his mother, his boat, lighthouse and sand pail with a new shovel stacked in front of him. This time he was truly going to sail his boat.

The picnickers chose a place on the sandy shore of the lake not far from the springboard. They were in the gayest of high spirits as they left Happy House, ready and eager for a long day's pleasure. They were going to have their swim before lunch. After that they were going to strike the tent and take a ride farther along Lake-view boulevard to a part of the lake where there was a small shallow inlet. There Junior could go swimming and wade about after his boat. There the larger boys could go wading, if they liked, and take turns paddling the canoe. A grassy field near by afforded a good place to practice playing catch.

Just at sunset they were going to make a fire and roast corn, potatoes and eggs. They would make coffee, too, and try cooking bacon over the blaze on sharp sticks. In the delightful cool of the evening when the dark was beginning to gather they were to break camp and go home.

Mr. Hopkins drove the truck as near to the

lake shore as he could. The jubilant load of boys speedily had the canoe and tent out of it and down on the sandy beach. They came hurrying back for the hampers and their bathing suits. These they had made into one bundle. The tent was put up under Mr. Hopkins' directions. Then a great sorting of bathing suits began.

"Put your shoes and stockings on the sand inside the tent and pile the rest of your clothing over them, boys," he advised. "Every boy keep to his own spot and keep clear of his neighbor's clothes. When you're ready for your dip come out of the tent; don't crowd it. Please don't go into the water until I am ready to be with you. I'll be a little behind you for I'm going to take the canoe and make a few soundings."

The Winners were only too pleased to obey Mr. Hopkins to the letter. He had already climbed high in their opinion. They prepared for their swim with happy zest and came whooping out of the tent like a band of Indians. They sat down cross-legged in a merry row on the shore to wait for him.

Junior was allowed to put on his bathing suit, but had been told he could not go into the water with the boys. Mrs. Hopkins was too wise to let



him run loose, however. She and Netta had contrived a safety belt to go round his waist. To this had been attached a long halter of thin tough rope. She had decided that this was the surest means of keeping track of him while they were at the springboard. When they reached the inlet Junior might then come into his glory and run free. The halter did not worry him much. His mother took charge of his boat temporarily, so he set up his lighthouse and dug quite a ditch around it with his shovel. He looked like a stray bit of golden sunshine dressed in a patch of blue sky in his bright blue suit. Every once in a while he would run beyond his tether and sit down on the sand with a jerk. This made him laugh, and he did it over and over again purposely.

John and Jimmy were both at a high pitch of excitement over actually going swimming in the lake at last. Mr. Hopkins had found the water all of twelve feet deep at the end of the springboard and at least five near shore. He was a clever diver and a strong swimmer and he showed the youngsters a fascinating stroke which even John and Jimmy found new. He joined heartily in a game of water tag and raced with anyone of the lads who challenged him. He kept

a starboard eye on his flock, but did not spoil their pleasure by giving orders which might hurt their boyish feelings or confuse them into losing the proper poise of the swimmer.

“ You and John are dandy swimmers,” praised Nelson after Jimmy had twice beaten him at racing. “ I guess you could beat Dick. Hoo-oo!” Nelson cried through his hands. “ Come on over, Dick. Try a race with Jimmy.”

“ All right.” Dick swam “ doggie ” to where the two boys floated. He had been farther out in the lake than they. He now swam shoreward. Before he reached his chums his keen eyes had caught sight of a bright blue car back on the boulevard. From among the trees just beyond the strip of beach a familiar figure was advancing. It was Howard Myers dressed in his very best.

“ Now why does he have to come here?” Dick muttered disgustedly. “ I s’pose he wants us to see him all dressed up.”

Howard continued to come jauntily forward. He was wearing an expensive fawn-colored knickerbocker suit, with a round hat of the same material. Even his ties and heavy silk stockings were of the same delicate shade.

“See here, Carter, I want to talk to you.” He came fairly close to the lake’s edge. “I have to; it’s about my team.” He expanded his chest and tried to appear businesslike. “I’ve been looking for you all morning.”

“Come along with me. Let’s see what he wants,” Dick said in low tones to Nelson and Jimmy. He did not answer Howard except by swimming toward him.

At this point Fred Bates came running down to the shore. “Gerald says get a hustle on, or he won’t wait for you,” was Fred’s message.

“Tell Gerald he’s a sorehead, and to go right along,” Howard retorted. “I’m the captain of the Great Little Players and I have to see this kid—er—Carter, I should say.”

By this time Dick, Nelson and Jimmy had reached the shore. Dick came out of the water very reluctantly. Jimmy and Nelson followed him, looking hardly more pleased.

“Tell me what you want,” Dick began ungraciously. “This is a swimming party. Mr. and Mrs. Hopkins made it for us, and I don’t want to talk about baseball just now.”

“I don’t care anything about your old swimming party.” Howard began to bristle. “I



can stand here if I want to. You don't own this lake; neither does Mr. Hopkins."

"Certainly we can stand here," loudly echoed Fred Bates. "I'll tell Gerald to go on, then come back here again. I think I'd like to stay around for a while." He made a derisive face at Dick.

"Hurry up, and tell him." Howard had just thought of something he could do to annoy the swimming party. Fred galloped off toward the blue car. Howard turned again to Dick. "I got your answer to my challenge," he said crossly. "You'll have to play us on the school lot. I'm not allowed to go into old Burton's meadow."

"You're not?" Dick exclaimed. "Why ——" He stopped short.

"None of your business why," snapped Howard. "I'm not. That's all. My father wants my team to play your team. He—he—would like to see me play ball, but"—Howard twisted uneasily—"but not on old Burton's ground."

"Would your father come to the game if we played you on the lot?" Jimmy broke in bluntly.

"Is your father mad at Mr. Burton for something?" Nelson asked, giving Howard a suspi-

cious look. "Is that why he won't let you?" Nelson, as well as Dick and Jimmy, had taken it for granted that Howard's father had forbidden him to set foot in the meadow.

"Go and ask him," Howard laughed disagreeably. He knew that none of the three boys would do it. "My father might come to the game unless he was too busy in the bank." Howard was sure his father would be "too busy." He was dealing dishonestly with the boys and he thought it was funny.

Dick stared at the fat boy, a displeased pucker between his brows. Jimmy and Nelson looked like two solemn young owls.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Myers," Dick said at last in his most grown-up tone. "I'll ask the other fellows and see what they say. If they 'don't want to play on the school lot, then there won't be any game. If you will wait around here 'bout ten minutes, I'll give you our answer."

"Oh, very well," Howard carelessly waved a plump hand. He had a ruby ring on the third finger which he wished to show off. "I'm going to be here for quite a while, anyway. Take your time."

Three disgusted boys hustled back into the

water and swam for the springboard. Their companions were diving from it, one after another. Dick waited until the last one had come to the surface of the water, then marshalled them together for a hasty decision.

Meanwhile Howard had gone up to Mr. Riley's stand to see Mr. Riley. The old man had a rowboat which he often used for fishing. He kept it tied to a post at the lake's edge, and directly below his shack. It was broad and squat and needed repainting, but it did not leak. Mr. Riley sometimes rented it for forty cents an hour, but he would never rent it to Howard. This morning Howard had made up his mind to have it. He coaxed and coaxed for it. Finally he offered Mr. Riley a whole dollar for an hour's use of the boat, and the old man gave in to him.

"You let me go 'n' untie it," Mr. Riley ordered as Howard left the shack. "I'll see then you git started out jest right."

"I've got to see some kids first. Wait till I come back," Howard called over one shoulder. The first sight he met as he came from the shack was a little group of boys drawn up on the shore. He swaggered over to the group, hands in his



pockets. "It's more'n ten minutes," he said only half civilly. "How about it?"

"We'll play you on the school lot," Dick said crisply, "on Thursday afternoon at half-past two. Does Alfred Harding suit you for an umpire?"

"No siree. My cousin Gerald is going to be umpire. He knows all about baseball. Alfred Harding's a back number beside Gerald."

For a minute it looked as though the Winners were going to send up a united and angry protest.

"It's not your place ——" began Nelson.

"Who said you could ——"

"Oh, go ahead, have your cousin for umpire," Dick raised his voice above the angry murmur. "No matter what you do, the Winners will beat you anyway. Come on, fellows." He turned and ran into the water with a defiant little yell which his comrades echoed as they followed him.

Howard did not enjoy this scornful treatment. He went back to Mr. Riley in a very bad humor. He dared not behave crossly to the old man or he would not get the boat. Fred was waiting at the stand for him. The two boys got into the boat and rowed away from shore, Mr. Riley shouting directions after them.

Howard made for the part of the water the swimming party were using. "We'll keep the boat right out at the end of the board and spoil those fresh kids' fun," he told Fred. "We can row around and around there and they can't stop us, but we can stop them. I don't care if Mr. Hopkins is with 'em. Who's he, anyway?"

It was a good thing for the swimmers that they had had their swim almost out when Howard appeared. The addition of the rowboat in the near neighborhood of the springboard was anything but pleasant. "Steady, boys," had been Mr. Hopkins' quiet advice when he saw through Howard's maneuver. "Don't dive within ten feet of that boat. We want no accidents, either to you or those boys in the boat."

"He's an awful mean one, isn't he?" Dick said hotly as he watched Howard trying to block Nelson's way for a dive. The fat boy and Fred were laughing loudly as though at something very funny. "I wish we'd said we wouldn't play him."

"I wish Fred Bates would splash Fatty's new suit," returned Charlie Merritt vengefully. "He throws the water way up every time his oar hits the lake. He can't row."

Right in the midst of Howard's wonderful time Mrs. Hopkins called from the shore: "Come, boys. It's almost noon. Lunch will be ready by the time you are ready for it." Howard's face fell as he saw the boys at once head for shore. He had just nicely started his fun. He turned peevishly on Fred who was bawling, "Ha, ha, ha!" and sending up jets and little fountains of water with the oars.

"What's the matter with you?" he scolded. "Cut out that water slopping. You've splashed my new suit in three or four places. Pull steady now. I'm going for a real row." Howard resolved to show those on shore his skill in rowing. When he saw that no one was watching him he grew grumpier than before. "They're going to eat," he informed Fred sulkily. He could see Mrs. Hopkins beginning to unpack the hampers and it made him hungry. He had spent every cent in his pockets for the boat. Now he could not buy even a penny chocolate. The two boys rowed on for a little without speaking.

"Wish those stingies would give us something to eat," grumbled Fred. "Come on to shore. I'm going home. My mother baked a big cocoa-



nut cake yesterday, and I'm going to get all I can of it."

"I guess I'll go home with you," Howard said. He looked at his wrist watch. "It's an hour since we took this boat. Riley'll charge me more if we don't hurry."

The oarsmen were within a few feet of the shore when a line of boys in knickers, blouses and canvas sports shoes emerged from the tent. The luncheon was spread on a square white cloth under a giant oak. Mrs. Hopkins and Netta were putting the last touches to it.

"Gee, but that looks great!" Howard smacked his lips. "Now you sit still, Fred, till I get out," he ordered. "I'll jump ashore and ground the boat." He rose rather clumsily from the seat. With the help of an oar he drove the boat to shore. "Now," he said, and made what he thought was a very clever leap to land.

The jarring he gave the boat loosened it from its insecure mooring. It parted from the shore just as Howard jumped. With a startled "Har-r-r-r," Howard missed his footing and sat down backwards in the lake. He appeared to fold together and sank slowly into the water, his head and feet disappearing in the same instant.

There were plenty of persons to see him this time. Fred, who was slim and wiry, made shore successfully, whooping and laughing. "Here, give us your hand," he yelled. Howard, blowing and puffing like a porpoise, struck angrily at the extended hand. He had managed to right himself and gain the shore. His face was red as a beet. He was so angry he could not talk.

"You—you—you—make me sick," he gurgled. "Don't you laugh at me." He turned fiercely on Fred. "This is my best suit. It cost pretty near a hundred dollars. Go tell Riley I'm done with his no-good boat. I'm going home. I'll catch it if my father sees me like this." Howard sloshed along the sand. His round cloth hat was gone, a slimy green leaf stuck to one fat cheek and a long green spray of waterweed twined around one silk stocking.

Suddenly, from the picnic ground a wild yell rose. The Winners had managed to keep back their mirth until they saw that Howard was safely out of the water. They could not help laughing at his mishap. He had come down to the lake determined to make trouble for the boys. The only person for whom he had successfully made trouble was himself.

## CHAPTER XIII

### PROVING THEIR METTLE

AFTER Howard angrily took himself dripping home the picnic party had no more disturbing interruptions. After lunch, which was just the kind of spread the boys most wanted, they all turned in and built a sand village for Junior. He had been such a good boy while the others were in swimming that Dick said he deserved it. The sand was yellow and not so dry as that of the seashore. The boys had to make round mounds for houses, but they laid the sand village out in streets with a public square in the middle and heaped up large mounds for public buildings.

Junior was so entranced with this new treasure that he hated to leave it when it came time for the party to move on to the inlet. It was the first time he had ever owned a whole village and he was anxious to cling to it. He soon forgot it after he reached the inlet. Here he was allowed to go in swimming and sail his boat on "lots of water." Though the Winners had had a long



swim that morning, they were just as eager as he to go water-paddling in the inlet's clear, shallow ripples. Mr. Hopkins launched the light canoe and they took turns navigating the inlet in it. Later they went up on an open grassy space above the shore and practiced catching and pitching. Mrs. Hopkins and Netta made them a big pail of lemonade with plenty of fruit juice, and ice in it. The ice had been brought from home wrapped in canvas. Mr. Hopkins served lemonade and advice at the same time as he watched the youngsters' clever work.

While it was yet light the one-day campers kindled their fire and roasted the eggs, corn and potatoes. More or less bacon fell into the fire until the young cooks caught the knack of making the strips stay where they were put. They all said it was the finest meal they had ever eaten and planned another picnic to the lake which was to be held in the fall when Mr. Hopkins should be at home for a few days.

The picnic outfit of one truck and one roadster, freighted with singing, laughing youngsters, rolled home in the cool of the evening when the first purple-gray shadows of dusk had begun to fall. Each boy was carried to his own gate.

The truck was then run up on the Hopkins' drive to be returned to the owner the next morning.

Next day was full of action for the Winners. They gathered at the cave before nine in the morning and practiced batting and base-running. Jimmy pitched every kind of ball he knew how to deliver. As Dick said: "We've got to know how to hit all kinds of curves." Not one of the team wanted Gerald Jones for umpire. It now became Dick's unpleasant duty to explain matters to Alfred Harding. He had already asked Alfred to be umpire.

The young man only laughed and pinched Dick's ear when Dick went to him with the grievance. "Don't worry about that, Dickie. My feelings aren't hurt. I'll come round to see the game, anyhow. You may need me. I understand Myers has shaken the little Six B team and picked one up of larger boys; not schoolboys. What I'd like to see the Winners do is whitewash him."

"We'll do that. See if we don't," Dick said grimly. "It'll be a good beat too, for he's having his own way about the lot and the umpire. The Winners aren't having theirs about anything, 'cept we'll beat the Great Little Players."

The lot where the game was to take place was nearest Dick's home. The Winners met at the hardware store at two o'clock on Thursday afternoon and walked to the diamond in a body.

"Oh, gee, look at the crowd!" exclaimed Ned Blake as they neared the lot.

At least a hundred persons were scattered in groups at the edge of the lot. While the spectators were mostly boys, there was a sprinkling of men among them and a few girls. The Seven A boys were there, full force.

"Never mind the crowd!" cried Nelson. "Look at Myers' team!" His voice carried his amazement. "Those fellows are great, big guys!"

"Whe-w-w!" whistled Dick as he made a quick survey of Howard's team. "I knew Fred Bates and Wallace Gray were in it. But those three tall kids—why, they're the ones I saw that day when we were in the cave and they came over to the meadow!"

"Are *they* the ones?" Charlie Newton's eyes opened wide. "Why, they don't go to school. They're mill boys."

"Yes, and those other three fellows live at Glenrock. That's two whole miles from Lake-



view. "That's a fine team, I must say," added Raymond Alden disdainfully.

Howard's players were at the left hand side of the lot, gathered about his cousin, Gerald Jones. For once he was out of the blue car, though it was parked at the edge of the lot. He was giving the team some loud advice. His right arm kept time with what he was saying.

The Great Little Players wore khaki trousers, white blouses, tan stockings and sneakers. Their caps were gay affairs of striped red and blue. Howard wore khaki-colored knickers of expensive cloth with a cap of the same material. His blouse was of white silk and his sports shoes were of fine quality.

As Dick's team came forward a boy in the crowd started a lively cheer. "'Rah for the Winners! 'Rah for our school team!" he burst forth. The cheer was repeated, and grew louder. The Lakeview boys did not regard Howard's team with favor. The Seven A boys kept up the cheering on purpose to tantalize Howard.

Jimmy and John had not been on the lot before. The diamond was worn smooth from constant use, but they liked the meadow best. They were both keeping a bright lookout for their fa-

ther. He had promised that he and their mother would drive over in the car and watch the game from it, provided they could find a good place to park the machine.

The Great Little Players had been the challenging team. They should have shown the Winners a little courtesy. They did nothing of the kind. They surrounded Gerald and Howard and argued loudly, or strolled about among the spectators. This last was a violation of baseball rules. There were no players' benches so the Winners drew off to one side of the home plate opposite to the other team. They were careful to keep the required distance from the plate. They intended to follow the rules of the game.

Just before half-past two Mr. and Mrs. Hopkins arrived in the roadster. Alfred Harding also appeared in company with the young man who had been with Mr. Burton on the day when he had discovered the cave.

It was twenty-five minutes of three when Gerald Jones swaggered over to the Winners and said: "Ready to play ball. You kids first at the bat." Howard was now walking importantly about the diamond placing his men to suit him.

“Humph!” Dick said scornfully to John. “He acts as though we weren’t anybody.”

“The Great Little Players look more like the Great Big Giants,” John returned with a soft chuckle.

“Well, well, how about it?” Gerald spoke impatiently. “Come along.”

“Yes, you’ll have to hurry, too, Mr. Umpire, and get the game started,” retorted Dick pleasantly. “It’s after two-thirty. The Winners like to start on time.”

“You only think you’re saying something,” Gerald flung back. He flushed, nevertheless, and walked away.

Ten minutes more went by before the game was really started. It began with a loud round of applause as Nelson White went to bat. Nelson was a favorite among the Lakeview boys. He made a fair hit which carried him safely to first base. Merritt was next called and distinguished himself. He batted the first ball pitched and sent it sailing far over toward left field. He made third base and Nelson made a run. One of the Glenrock boys was pitcher. He used a good deal of strength in pitching, but not much skill. The Winners found the balls he sent far



easier to hit than were the ones Jimmy was so clever at sending. At the end of the inning the Winners had scored three runs. Their rivals had made two errors.

The Great Little Players then came to bat and made no such showing. Their team was made up of boys from thirteen to sixteen years of age. They played poorly because they did not work together. As captain, Howard only made matters worse. He continually confused them by shouting at them to do this or that, and grumbled at them when they were struck out. They played about as well as might have been expected, considering they had had little practice. Howard thought they could whitewash Dick's team simply because they were larger boys.

At the end of the third inning the Winners had piled up quite a score while the other team had done very little. Howard called his team off to one side for a private talk in which Gerald Jones joined. The ten boys stood with their heads together for ten minutes while the Winners patiently waited to resume play and the impatient fans hurled remarks of "Play ball!" "Attaboy!" "Back to the diamond!" Alfred Harding saw the drift of matters and half de-

cided to interfere. He did not, however, believing the Winners to be plucky enough to hold their own.

With Fred Bates at the bat at the beginning of the fourth inning a new and unpleasant state of affairs began. Gerald Jones interrupted the game to find fault with Jimmy. "You're out of position," he shouted at Jimmy. "You keep moving out of position all the time. I know. I've got your number."

Jimmy knew that he was not out of position at all. He stolidly pitched the next ball without having moved an inch. Neither did he answer the umpire's unjust accusation. Gerald saw he would gain nothing in that direction so he next accused Dick of interfering with the batter. Dick, Jimmy and John had studied a baseball guide which Mr. Hopkins had sent them. Dick quoted from the guide the exact position of the catcher. He ended with: "Say, what's the matter with you? Play ball." Gerald scowled fiercely, but ordered the game resumed.

Nelson's fielding was next attacked. Gerald claimed that Nelson did not catch a ball around which his hands closed near the ground. The tricky umpire ruled it safe. He claimed that Nel-

son had stooped and grabbed it like a flash after it struck the field. As the inning continued to be played Gerald grew more and more unfair to the Winners and more partial to Howard's team. He awarded a stolen base to Wallace Gray after Merritt had touched him out with the ball. He allowed his friends to steal bases and never called one of them out. He claimed it was fair enough, and only intended to "rattle you kids."

The Winners found themselves playing against a team of such dishonest methods they hated to go on playing against them. They kept doggedly at it, however, playing their honest best and piling up their score.

Some of the watchers of the game grew disgusted after the Great Little Players had begun to show their true colors. These left the field. About half of the crowd stayed on, curious to see the end of the game, and admiring and encouraging the Winners' stubborn grit. The Seven A boys amused themselves by jeering and even hissing Gerald Jones. Every time he raised his voice, his shouted remarks to the players met with hisses and groans. This made him so furiously angry that he thought he would show



“those freshies” that he was umpire and would do as he pleased. He was out of temper with Howard’s “joke of a team” and with Howard, too. While he addressed Jimmy as “Hey, you,” and Dick as “skinny” and “freckle-phiz,” he called Howard “You big fat calf.”

“Gracious, I’m glad this game’s pretty nearly over,” murmured Dick in Jimmy’s ear, as the team stood ready for the first half of the eighth inning. “We’ve more’n whitewashed ’em.”

“Glad of it, but no more games like this for me.” Jimmy’s blue eyes flashed. He was wondering what his father and mother would think of such a queer game.

Howard’s team were growing tired of being “bossed,” first by Gerald, then by Howard. They had played badly and they were smarting at being jeered at by the fans. They were ready to desert the game at a moment’s notice.

The inning began and two Great Little Players were quickly put out. Howard came next to the bat. He braced his feet, threw back his head and flourished the bat as though sure of making a wonderful hit. His first attempt at the ball was a failure. His second—he missed the ball again, but the ball did not miss him. He made

a sidewise movement with the bat as Jimmy delivered one of his usual snappy balls. Whack! the ball struck Howard squarely on the bridge of the nose.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE END OF THE GAME

“OW-OW-W-W-W-WOW-OW!” He flung the bat from him and clapped both hands to his injured nose. The bat struck Gerald on the ankle. This did not sweeten his temper. Howard began hopping around, crying and sobbing like a small child. The harder he hopped, the louder grew his howls.

“Oh, cut out that bawling!” exclaimed Gerald. “You’re not killed.”

“Oh, I am, too! My n-n-nose i-s br-ro-oken!” wailed Howard, between sobs and gurgles. “Ca-l-l the g-game. I can’t—play—any—more.”

“Game!” roared Gerald in his crossiest tones.

In spite of Howard’s sudden misfortune the Winners stuck to their positions. Their captain had not called them to the home plate. As catcher Dick was near Howard. He was having a hard time to keep a sober face. He was sorry for Howard, but oh, how he wanted to laugh.



The instant Gerald called "Game" the Winners hurried forward. The Seven A boys and other Lakeview schoolmates drew near the plate to see what had happened. Gerald flew at the Seven A boys like a hornet and shooed them away from the plate. "You sassies have a lot of nerve to come over here," he raged as he made wild passes at them. They merely ran away, laughing.

The three mill boys, Fred and Wallace now added themselves to the group about Howard. The Glenrock boys had seized the opportunity and vanished. For the first time in his life Howard was a center of attraction. His bruised and rapidly swelling nose demanded sympathy, and Howard received plenty of it. His nose was not bleeding, and the first severe pain had subsided to a dull ache. He still whimpered and snuffled into a large white handkerchief which he kept over his face. He answered the boys' kindly repeated questions, "Does it hurt much yet?" "Do you feel better?" only by a faint nod or a groan. When Jimmy said sincerely, "I'm sorry as anything the ball hit you. 'Course you know I didn't mean it to," Howard gave an angry "Huh!" and waved Jimmy away from him.

Just then Alfred Harding and Mr. Burton's

friend came up to the circle around Howard. "Well, Dick," Alfred said pleasantly, "the Winners certainly played a fine game." He glanced at Howard, but without sympathy. He was so disgusted with the unfairness shown by Howard and his team, he could not honestly say a consoling word to the fat boy.

"We tried to, Alfred," Dick replied with meaning. He gave the young man a quick, bright glance which Alfred understood.

"The Winners were so far ahead of the other team at the beginning of the eighth inning you could have called 'Game' then, if you had cared to do so. Here's your score. I thought you'd like me to keep one."

"Oh, thank you. You're a good pal, Alfred." Dick beamed his gratitude. "Here's my score. I kept it for the team. Let's see if we have 'em just alike."

The crowd of boys forgot Howard and turned their attention to the score-cards Dick was holding. His teammates leaned over his shoulders from behind as he began comparing the two records aloud. Gerald had roughly called, "Come on, bawl-baby!" and made a bee-line for the blue car. His ankle ached and he had had enough of

being umpire. Howard had heard him, but he wanted to pretend that he was still suffering greatly. The minute Dick began to read his anger rose.

“That’s not so. Your old score’s no good,” he wrathfully shouted. “Maybe you made a few more runs than we did, but nothing like what you’ve given your team.” He dropped the handkerchief he was still holding to his nose and tried to snatch the cards from Dick.

Next minute Howard found himself being walked rapidly toward the edge of the lot where Gerald waited for him in the car. A firm, though not unkind, hand was at the back of his soft blouse collar. “Home’s the best place for you,” a crisp voice advised. “Bathe your nose with witch-hazel, and behave yourself well for at least ten minutes,—if you can.” The young man who was Mr. Burton’s friend turned on his heel and went back to the diamond.

With Howard thus led off by the collar the five other members of the Great Little Players vanished in a hurry. The Winners were left the victors on the lot.

“I never played such a crazy game of ball before,” Dick declared, “with one team cheating



every minute and our team playing fair, but letting 'em cheat. But we all said we'd keep on to the end, no matter what they did."

"I'm proud of you, boys," a voice broke in. Mr. and Mrs. Hopkins had come up so quietly no one saw them. "You're Winners and Great Little Players, too. You didn't let anything the other team did keep you from scoring." Mr. Hopkins patted Dick on the back.

"Oh, *they* couldn't play well," Nelson said frankly. "We'd have beat 'em anyway if they had played fair. Howard Myers' little old Six B team used to do better than these fellows did."

"We had a good game with the Seven As last week," put in Merritt. "You ought to see us play them."

While they all stood talking Jimmy introduced his father and mother to Alfred Harding. He, in turn, introduced them to his companion. He was a young man from Chicago, and a nephew of Mr. Burton's wife. His name was Robert West. He was a junior at Yale College and a football star. The Winners thought him a very great person. He promised to come and see their next game with the Seven A boys. The A boys had not run far when Gerald had attempted to

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chase them off the lot. Now they were on hand to meet Mr. Robert West and arrange a game for the Thursday of the next week.

Before the Winners left the field Mr. Hopkins went over to the car and came back with a large package. Opened, it contained nine boxes of candy, one for each player. The boys fell upon the sweets with noisy thanks and shared them with the A boys and the few others still present.

Dick, John and Jimmy finally piled into the Hopkins' car.

"Ahem! This bus goes to Happy House," reminded Mrs. Hopkins, who loved to tease Dick. His mischievous freckled face broke into smiles. He knew it was near enough to dinner time to warrant his going straight home.

"I'm only going as far as the veranda and run home fast. I want to say something to John and Jimmy, and then I want to laugh as hard as I can." Dick's blue eyes were two dancing stars.

"All right. I'll let you boys have the tonneau. It's my turn to have the front seat, anyway." She smiled gaily at Dick.

"What is it? What is it?" John repeated curiously as the car started.

"It's about—oh, ha, ha, ha!" Dick hugged his

knees and rocked back and forth on the edge of the seat. "It's about that first letter I got from Howard Myers. I wanted to laugh when he got hit with the ball, even if it did hurt him, and then he threw the bat and hit that old umpire." John and Jimmy giggled as Dick said this. It was the first they had heard of Gerald's mishap.

"I kept biting my hand hard's I could and didn't look at Howard at all," Dick continued. "Then I thought of something about Fatty Myers that made me want to laugh harder. I stopped thinking of it as soon as I could. Now I'll tell you what it was, and you'll think it's funny, too. You know he said in the letter that he would hand us, he, he, he, a h-h-ard wallop." Dick broke into chuckles. "He said it would make us cry and carry on awful; that he'd laugh at us and have a deep revenge. And now"—Dick gave himself up to mirth again briefly—"he's the one who got the hard wallop on the nose. He did cry and carry on awful, and that made *us* want to laugh, even if we didn't, right then. Every single thing he said would happen to us, happened to him."



## CHAPTER XV

### GETTING READY FOR THE CIRCUS

"WE'LL have to hurry like everything if we have the circus while Daddy's home," Jimmy said to Dick the next morning. Now that the ball game which they had not wished to play was out of the way the circus was next to be considered.

"Oh, it's easy to get up a show," Dick returned confidently. "We have to have a menagerie, and then the part when the acrobats perform, and a side-show and two clowns. We can have singing and dancing if we know anybody that can sing or dance."

"The chicken crates'll be fine for the menagerie," planned John. "We'll put Sunshine in one and Taffy in another and Doodle in another. We can introduce Doodle to the audience in a cage and then let Junior coax him out."

"I guess he'll come out fast enough," laughed Jimmy. "We can put Bolivar in a crate. That's one more animal. Tip will have to be in the performance."

“Well, Sunny can be, too. You know he can sing,” John reminded Jimmy. “That’ll be a good feature. We’ll have him for the great singing cat, and Taffy can be the great Angora rat catcher. He’s caught five rats this summer, and Sunny’s only caught three.”

“How can a cat sing?” Dick asked unbelievably. “They can yowl, but that’s not singing.”

John laughed. “Oh, Sunny can’t sing tunes, but when anybody else sings he can sing, too. Wait till you hear him.”

“When John first began to take music lessons Sunny would come into the living-room and me-ow all the time John was playing. After while when John could play pretty well he made up a song; the words and the tune, too, just for Sunny. He sang it to Sunny so many times that now he knows it. Every time John sings it, he yells right along with it,” Jimmy explained.

“The name of the song is, ‘Sunny, You and I Will Sing,’” John informed Dick stoutly. “He’ll sing it with me. He can’t run away for he’ll be in a crate.”

“Well, all right. What shall we call Bolivar?” Dick asked for a paper and pencil which John

brought him. He put down Sunny's and Taffy's titles of honor and looked expectantly at John. John was quick to think of new names.

"Oh, I don't know. A real traveling snapping turtle, I guess; probably twelve or fourteen years old. Daddy said he was. Doodle can be the famous trained rooster."

"Nelson's folks have an old parrot," was Dick's next bright thought, "and Merritt's brother has a tame raccoon. They'd be fine. I'll go to Whites and Merritts before lunch and ask the fellows if they'll bring 'em."

"We'll bring the phonograph outdoors, but we ought to have a drum and a comb band," Jimmy said. "Junie has a pretty good drum. I can beat that and let Ray Alden take tickets. We'll charge grown folks three cents and children a penny. We don't want to make money, but there's no fun in selling tickets for pins. If any children should want to come to our circus who couldn't afford to pay a penny, I s'pose we ought to let them in."

"The side yard'll be best, back beyond the trees," was Dick's opinion. "While I'm gone home to lunch I wish you'd cover a box with red cloth for me to stand on and holler at the crowd."



I'll see what my father'll let me have to make the circus real dandy."

As a manager Dick was a hustler. He made the rounds of his chums' houses, got the promise of the parrot and the raccoon and engaged Ned Blake's small brother to appear in an Indian costume he had worn at a kiddies' Hallowe'en party. He came panting and perspiring back to Happy House laden with a huge green cotton umbrella, a megaphone, a piece of red, white and blue bunting and a red silk high hat which his father had once worn in a home talent minstrel show.

"I can nail some sticks so that they will hold up this umbrella when it's open," planned Jimmy. "It will make a good top for a lemonade stand. We need the megaphone to talk through and the bunting will be fine to decorate with. Junior could wear the hat, maybe, when he performs with Doodle. It's quite small inside, and it would make folks laugh to see Junie in that funny hat." The three energetic circus men themselves laughed at the prospect.

"It doesn't look as though it was going to rain to-day. I hope it won't to-morrow. We'll put our stuff in the garage to-night. I fixed that

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box. Mother gave me a turkey-red table-cloth to cover it with. Come and see it." Jimmy beckoned Dick toward the garage.

Charlie Newton and John were to be the clowns. Each owned a clown suit, so they were prepared. Dick would manage the ring and Jimmy the band. They begged a very large piece of unbleached muslin from Mrs. Hopkins and cut it up into pennants and banners. The three boys spent a busy afternoon lettering these with colored crayons. One fairly large, oblong banner bore the cheering information, "Circus To-day. Menagerie, Side-Show and Magnificent Performance. Wonderful Features. Take a Look at Tip the Smart Trick Dog. Two Clowns. Lemonade Sold on the Grounds. Adults 3 cents. Children 1 cent." This banner was to be hung on the fence at the left of the gates.

"I don't know what we can have in our side-show." Dick stared with a deep frown at the striped tent rolled up in a corner of the garage. "We've such a dandy tent we ought to have something kind of special to go in it."

"You mean like a giant or a skeleton man or a fat lady, don't you?" John asked.

Dick nodded. "Yep; but we couldn't get any

real ones. We might make a fat man of George Sterns by stuffing him all up with feather pillows. I guess that's what we'll have to do. Will your mother let us have a whole lot of pillows?"

"Oh, yes. We'll have to make him a robe out of a couple of sheets and tie it around the waist with a cord," returned resourceful Jimmy. "I don't think he'll be very funny, though."

"He'll be better than no side-show at all. Only we can't charge a cent extra to see him." Dick proposed to be an honest showman. The others agreed that he was right.

The boys moved the pile of empty chicken crates from one corner of the chicken park to the circus ground. They washed them with the hose and set them in the sun to dry. They hammered and tacked, chalked banners and signs and planned happily just where each attraction was to be placed. They covered a low, broad box with pink crêpe paper for the fat man, hoping they might be able to stuff him so that he would look quite like a "fatty."

Junior hailed the new enterprise with zest, but as usual, hindered the busy showmen. He chalked a bright green, ragged "J U N O R" on



the piece of cloth Dick was saving for the side-show poster. The green letters showed so plainly from even the other side of the cloth that Dick was in despair until John took the cloth to Netta and asked her to wash it.

“You want to watch what you’re doing, Junie,” John told Junior severely. “You let our stuff alone. You don’t know what it’s for or how to use it.”

“I do know. It are for the circus. I don’t like you, cross Johnny. You stick out your head like Bulvider. I are going to stay by Jimmy.”

Junior moved over to where Jimmy was cutting folds of colored paper for swinging decorations. Jimmy gave him a small pair of scissors and some blue tissue paper to cut up. Junior made short work of cutting up the paper, dropped the scissors in the grass and steered for a pan of flour paste that was very necessary to the showmen. They had made a large sign-board of heavy gray wrapping paper and intended to paste it full of colored pictures of animals which had come from a stack of John’s and Jimmy’s old toy books.

They had not yet tackled the pasting job, so Junior got ahead of them. He pounced upon

the paste brush and looked about him for something to paste. The pile of pictures lay beside the paste pan. Junior seized the first, an open-mouthed gorilla with a club in its hairy hand, wiped the dripping brush on the back of the print and pasted it squarely on the pale pink front of the fat man's stand. He was all ready to paste the second print when Dick saw him, gave a horrified gasp and bounced to the rescue of the pale pink stand. "Oh, gee! Oh, my! Just see what Junie's done!" he exclaimed. "Here, Junie, give me that brush. We'll have to watch him or he'll mix up everything."

"It's almost time for his nap," John sighed. "I like to have him play with us, only he pokes into things so." John had to laugh a little as he looked at the pink stand. "We can paste on a new front," he said. "You caught him just in time."

Mrs. Hopkins came for Junior shortly afterward so the three boys could work, undisturbed. They put in a fruitful afternoon. When Dick went home shortly before six, the array of strange, but gorgeous, circus properties stored in the garage gave promise of wonders to come the next day.

## CHAPTER XVI

### “EPHO”

DICK appeared before nine o'clock the next morning. He looked slightly gloomy. “George says he doesn't want to be a fat man,” was his greeting as he walked into the dining-room where John and Jimmy were lingering over their fresh, sticky cinnamon buns and milk.

“He doesn't?” John looked up in surprise. A brown sugary half circle began at his mouth and ended in the middle of one cheek. “Oh, Netta,” he called hospitably, “please bring a bun and some milk for Dick.”

“My mother never told me I couldn't eat *breakfast* here, so I guess I can. It'll be all right till I see her, anyhow.” Dick was soon enjoying buns and milk with his chums.

“Why won't George be the fat man?” asked Jimmy. “I'd just as soon be him if I hadn't so many things to see to.”

“Oh, he hates being stuffed up. He says he'll walk on his hands and jump over two chairs if



you want him to. All the fellows are coming here this morning. Maybe Nelson will be the fatty.”

Soon after Dick's arrival Merritt appeared with the pet raccoon in his cage. Nelson followed him with the parrot's unwieldy cage. The parrot was large and green and yellow. It shrieked “Hello, hello!” as Nelson carried it across the lawn.

John's and Jimmy's chums were not the only persons who came to Happy House that morning. Celia, Uncle Jabez' daughter, came to do the Hopkins' washing. With her she brought Ephraim, her only son. Ephraim was a quiet-acting little boy of nine, brown in color and with bright brown eyes. His hair was kinky and so thick it stood out on his head in all directions. Celia brought Ephraim with her once in a while when she came to wash. John and Jimmy liked him and liked to play with him.

“Come on, Ephie,” called John as he raced across the drive with the boys. “We're getting ready to have a circus, and maybe you can be in it.”

Ephraim's eyes glistened. He glanced up at his mother who said: “Go 'long, chile; behave youself,” and scudded after the boys.

Junior was not on hand that morning. Mr. Hopkins had mercifully taken him to Lakeview in the car. Jimmy had privately begged of his father: "Daddy, won't you please take Junie with you in the car this morning? When he comes back everything will be fixed. We're so busy!"

When Ephraim rather shyly joined the noisy group of youngsters Dick was busy asking Nelson to be the fat man. "You don't have to be it long," he pleaded. "We can close the side-show after the performance begins and not open it again. Everybody'll know you're stuffed and not want to see you more than once."

While he was talking to Nelson Dick happened to catch sight of Ephraim. He looked the little brown boy over from his mop of kinky hair to his bare feet. Dick thought he had never seen such a queer head of hair except in books that had pictures of wild men and cannibals. He had once seen some savages in a circus that came to Lakeview. They did not have hair as long as Ephraim's. All of a sudden Dick became brilliantly inspired.

"Say, Ephie," he began excitedly, beckoning to the brown boy, "how'd *you* like to be in the

show, and be the wild man? All you have to do is to sit in the bottom of a cage and pretend you can't talk like we do. You make up talk. I'll tell you how pretty soon. We paint up your face and hang some rings in your ears and you growl like anything when anyone speaks to you. You can have one side of the tent and the fatty can have the other. We'll cover a box with green for your cage to be on and put grass and plants around the stand to make it look wild. Say, would you like that?"

"Ah dunno. Mebbe it would be purty good. I'd as lief do that's anything." Ephraim was delighted at the honor, but too shy to say so.

"All right. You're it, then." Dick called John and set forth his new plan. He fairly bubbled over with satisfaction. "How do you think he ought to dress?" he asked John anxiously.

"Oh, hardly any clothes at all," was the off-hand reply. "He can't wear a blouse and pants. He ought to have a piece of white cloth like a short skirt, and not any waist."

"But maybe his mother wouldn't want him to dress like that. Mine wouldn't." Dick showed worry at this setback.

"No; Mother wouldn't let us either," John



nodded. "Let me see." John did some hard thinking. "I know what to do," he finally said. "We can dress Ephie in a canvas sack; and he'll look fine. He can keep on his underclothes, but take off his blouse and pants. We'll cut a hole in the sack for his head and two for his arms. Gracious! He *will* look wild. We've a lot of sacks in the cellar."

He had hardly said "cellar" before Dick was gone. Dick had had permission to go into the Hopkins' cellar for whatever he needed in forwarding the circus. He was soon back with two canvas sacks which he laid out on the grass. He explained what he was going to do to the others who were noisily enthusiastic. They laughed and joked with Ephraim who began to believe that he was a brown boy of some consequence. Nelson decided that it would be fun to be a fatty and occupy the tent with the wild man.

"What kin' cage you all gwine put me in?" Ephraim inquired. "Ah reckons mebbe it has to be a whoppin' one."

"It's a chicken crate, but it's good and large. You can't stand up in it, but you can sit down all right," Jimmy answered. "Dick's going to bring it soon as we have the tent up."

The crate was indeed a large one and must have been built for full-grown turkeys. The door was a tight squeeze, but Ephraim was so slim he managed to wriggle through the opening. With his unflagging energy Dick cut the holes in the sack and fitted the new garment over Ephraim's blouse and short trousers.

“Now what you ought to say is ‘blub, blub, blub,’ and ‘gub, gub, gub,’ and ‘wagl, gagl, chagl’ and things like that; just silly stuff, you know,” Dick instructed the brown boy. “Then you have to growl like this: ‘grrr-rr-rr’ and ‘brr-rr-rr-br-rr,’ but blub and ub and gub are the best. They sound as if you didn't know anything. I'll fix you right after lunch.” He gave Ephraim further instructions which Ephie solemnly promised to follow.

It took the boys the whole morning, working every minute, to set out the circus properties. They finished just at noon and ran home, promising Jimmy to hurry back. The poster was up on the fence and the bright-colored stands and banners among the trees looked inviting. The ring had been marked on the open space of lawn which met that part given over to trees and ornamental shrubs. The instant he finished his

lunch Jimmy hurried to find Sunshine and Taffy. He fed them and put them in their cages. He did not want to have to hunt them later. He and John had a hard siege with Bolivar before they triumphantly hoisted him from the water. As fast as they shoveled him up he slid back into the rain barrel. Altogether the menagerie boasted six cages. Each cage had a strip of gaily chalked muslin fastened around it, and about three inches from the top, describing the inmate in glowing terms.

Doodle was badly upset at finding himself suddenly back in a crate again. He crowed and "cuh huhed" and "harruped" and would not touch the piece of cookie Junior gave him. Sunshine opened his pink mouth wide, yawned and lay calmly down in the bottom of the cage. Taffy rolled and played and batted a cushiony yellow paw through the bars at Jimmy. Bolivar ran his head out a few times and snapped crossly, then retired to the back of his cage. The raccoon was used to a cage and being stared at. So was the parrot. He sat on the edge of his seed cup and gobbled seed. Occasionally he said a few words, or laughed in a queer, hoarse voice.

The circus was to open at two o'clock, but the



circusmen were all in their places by one. Everything was in readiness for the public, even to “Epho, the Fierce Black Wild Man.” This was the name Dick had made up for his latest attraction. Ephie was truly a sight to behold. The canvas sack just missed his brown knees. The combination of it and his heavy crop of kinky hair gave him a truly wild appearance. He had green and purple circles chalked around his legs and red and blue ones on his arms. He had a blue-linked necklace chalked about his neck and a three-cornered design in red on each cheek and another on his forehead. He had three darts from John’s dart board set stuck through his hair. Two blue glass curtain rings hung from his ears on red strings. Around his canvas waist he wore a rusty piece of chain. He scowled, growled, branished a tree branch and pretended to be very fierce.

“He’s worth a cent to see,” Dick declared proudly after they had Epho’s cage on its stand and Epho had climbed into it. “Nelson looks all right, too.” Nelson stood on his pink stand looking like an immense snow man with huge, bulging legs and arms.

“I hope a crowd will come,” Jimmy said. “I

must go and start my band to playing a piece." George, Ned and Merritt were to play on combs while Jimmy beat the drum. The phonograph was to be played while the acrobats were performing in the ring.

Soon the three comb musicians were blowing as hard as they could on "Marching Through Georgia" as they paraded down to the gates to give a concert. Jimmy marched behind them banging the drum. He looked pleased as he spied a little knot of children clustered around the gate. They drew back a little as the boys reached the gate. The tallest of them, a girl of about twelve, asked: "Can you get in to see the circus if you have just pins?"

"We don't want any pins." Jimmy shook his head. "If you ——"

"Well, then we can't see it. Come on, you kids." She turned away.

"Wait a minute," Jimmy called. "I was going to tell you to come in. It doesn't matter about the money."

"I like to pay if other people do," replied the girl with a proud little toss of her black head. She was a pretty girl with big blue eyes and thick black curls. "Would you let us be in the show?"

You ought to hear us sing. My mother says we're the seven singing Flanagans; we're only five here, though, and two home.”

“We'd like to have you sing.” Jimmy smiled in his friendliest way. “My brother and his cat are going to sing, but that's all the singing we were going to have.”

“Oh, ho, ho! How funny to have a cat sing!” A younger girl, who looked like her older sister, clapped her hands. “I know it's a nice circus.”

“It's a pretty good one.” Jimmy opened the gate for the five children. There were four girls and one boy. He was not much older than Junior.

Just then Raymond came down to the gate to take his place as ticket man. “How de do, Margaret; having a good time this vacation?” he greeted, raising his cap.

“Um, pretty good. I'm going to be in the circus. That'll be fun!” Margaret was smiling radiantly.

“I'm glad you are.” Raymond smiled back at her. “Margaret sings alone in school, Jimmy. She can sing just fine.”

Jimmy paraded the new performers up to Dick who also smiled all over his face. “This is great



luck," he declared. "You can sing a song together after George walks on his hands, and then Margaret can sing alone."

Jimmy had to hurry back to the band. They started "Yankee Doodle" and played it with such spirit that four boys paid their penny apiece and entered the circus grounds. After that the audience began to come along by twos and threes. Dick was amazed when his mother and a young lady who lived next door to the Carters came walking up to him. The other boys were equally surprised to see their mothers and sisters. The Seven A boys came and brought fifteen other boys with them.

Jimmy had to take Merritt out of the band so that he might collect the money in front of the side-show. The performance had not yet begun so the crowd strolled about looking at the menagerie, or visiting the side-show. They bought all the lemonade before the real show began, and John had to hurry into the house and ask Netta if they couldn't please have some more. John was tending the lemonade stand in his clown suit.

When Dick rang a bell which announced the beginning of the show there were at least seventy-five persons on the strip of lawn reserved for the

audience. Ned Blake's small brother opened the show with a tomahawk dance. He wore an Indian costume. He flew into the ring whirling a tomahawk about his head. He was so little and he took such long steps and whooped in such a high, shrill voice he made the audience laugh. While he was dancing who should come walking up to the crowd but Mr. Burton, Alfred Harding and Robert West. Jimmy was so greatly surprised he almost let fall to the ground a handful of pennies Merritt had just given him. Mr. Burton was the last person he had expected to see at the circus.

## CHAPTER XVII

### JUST LIKE A REAL CIRCUS

JOHN and Sunshine came next on the program. Dick roared "Master John Hopkins and his Great Singing Cat" through the megaphone. John ran into the ring in his clown suit. He bowed right and left as Dick brought a square box covered with orange-colored crêpe paper to him and set Sunshine's cage upon it. John leaned down toward Sunshine and said very loudly and clearly: "We're going to sing, Sunshine."

Sunshine stood up and arched his back for John to pat him. Instead John began the song. He sang the words to a little waltz tune he had composed.

"Sunny, you and I will sing,  
Sing up loud like everything."

Sunshine began to twitch his ears. He fixed his green eyes on John in a steady stare. As



John sang the second line he joined in with a loud protesting "Ya-a-a-a!"

There are to be found both cats and dogs which object to music, either vocal or instrumental. The sound of it seems to hurt their heads. Sunshine did not like music, so he always mewed when John sang to him. He kept such good time to the singing with his sharp little "Ya-a-as" and "me-ow-ws," it sounded as though he were trying to sing, too.

"Sing of all the fun we know,  
Not too fast and not too slow.  
Sing of birds and butterflies,  
Sing of nice blue pretty skies;  
Sing of two fat yellow cats,  
Taffy, Sunny—they catch rats:  
Sing as hard as you can yell:  
That's the way to sing quite well."

John sang the song over twice. The last time Sunshine not only sang "ya-a-s" and "me-ow." He wailed "how-r-o-ow, mr-r-ow-w!" The loud clapping and laughter at the end of the duet startled the big yellow puss. He gave a frightened sideways leap. His weight set the cage and stand to rocking, then over it went! The cage door swung open and Sunshine shot

through it like an orange flash. Away he sped and vanished around a corner of the house.

Dick trumpeted "Master George Sterns in a Mar-vil-us Acrobatic Act," hastily laid down the megaphone and started the phonograph. George wore a red sweater and his gray baseball knickers, red stockings and sneakers. He promenaded twice around the ring on his hands, turned a back somersault, jumped over two chairs and completed his act with a very good exhibition of high kicking.

The five Flanagans followed him. They paraded grandly into the ring, drew up in a straight line, with Margaret in the middle; hands behind their backs. "La, la, la." Margaret gave them the pitch. "Ready," she said briskly, and they burst into that old sweet Irish song, "Believe me if all these endearing young charms." The sister next oldest to Margaret could sing alto and the blending of the tuneful young voices was beautiful. And how they all sang! They opened their mouths and sang like a flock of canaries.

The Irish song delighted the audience. Mr. Burton called out: "Encore, encore! Give us another Irish song." Margaret started "The

harp that once through Tara's Halls " and the musical Flanagans sang it as sweetly as they had the first song.

After that Dick announced "Master Junie Hopkins and Doodle, the Trained Rooster." Junior was greeted with shouts of laughter as he sauntered into the ring behind Doodle's cage. He wore a white suit, red slippers and white silk short socks, and—the red silk hat. Mrs. Hopkins had padded the inside of the hat to fit Junior's head, though it tilted back a wee bit. He carried a long red ribbon in one hand and a square of sponge cake in the other. Sponge cake was Doodle's favorite treat. As soon as Dick set Doodle's cage on the ground Junior carefully lifted his hat from his head, using both hands, and made the audience a funny, jerky bow.

The instant Doodle saw Junior and the cake he began stepping high and poking his neck forward. Junior waved the cake in front of the wooden bars several times, then opened the cage door. Doodle put his head out first, peered cautiously about and strutted out. Junior waved the cake before the big rooster's eyes and began walking slowly backward. Doodle followed him with little, mincing steps. After



Junior had walked him around the ring twice he gave him a small piece of cake. Doodle ate the second bite from the little boy's hand. He allowed Junior to slip the ribbon over his neck and Junior led him up and down the ring, not forgetting to lure him along with more cake.

Right into the middle of this interesting act bounced disaster. It bounced in the shape of Tip. Tip liked sponge cake as well as Doodle, and Junior was not giving him any. Tip had not done his act yet, but he had been having a glorious time barking at Sunny and Taffy and prancing about the raccoon's cage. Tip was Doodle's greatest trial. He ran and squawked whenever Tip came near the chicken yard fence. Tip caught sight of Junior and smelled the cake. He tore joyously into the ring, tangled himself in the red ribbon and leaped upon Junior. Down went the rooster trainer. His red silk hat dropped off his head and rolled along the ground. Doodle spread his wings, made a half-flying leap and fled for his life. Junior dropped the remainder of the sponge cake and Tip ate it greedily.

The crowd set up a mirthful roar and the

circusmen had to wait for them to become quiet before they could proceed with the show.

Margaret then came to the ring and sang a popular song. She was encored and sang an old Irish lullaby. Tip was then bundled into the ring by Jimmy to do his tricks. He opened his mouth and hung out his red tongue as though he were laughing at Doodle's scare. Jimmy put him through all the clever tricks he knew; playing dead, counting to six, playing lame, shaking hands, sitting up and retrieving a rubber ball.

The last number was a clown act with John and Charlie Newton as the actors. They tumbled about the ring, pretended to wrestle, tried to jump through a barrel hoop and fell down, took turns sitting in a chair that always collapsed the minute it was used and did other funny, foolish things.

During the performance Mr. and Mrs. Hopkins joined Mr. Burton and the two young men. While the clowns were doing their act, Mr. Hopkins came and whispered something to Jimmy. His face grew radiant as he listened. He stepped to the center of the ring just as the clowns ran from it and called loudly: "Please,

everyone, Mr. Burton wants you to stay for a little while. He has a surprise for you."

Mr. Burton had planned his surprise before he came to the circus. It was ready and on the Hopkins' back veranda in the shape of three freezers of ice-cream and a generous supply of fancy cakes with a caterer to serve the spread. He had not forgotten what John and Jimmy had told him regarding the happiness of surprises. Two-thirds of the audience were children, and he was glad of that.

This was a feature the circusmen had not counted on. They were bewildered by their good luck; then jubilant. Chairs from the house were added to those already on the veranda for the grown-ups. The happy boys and girls perched on the steps or sat on the grass. The circus lot was quickly deserted. Only one person remained on it. That person was very brown and very indignant. Safely locked in his cage in the side-show tent sat Epho, the wild man, tearful and forgotten.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### A DESPERATE WILD MAN

SOON after the performance had begun Nelson deserted the side-show and waddled across the lawn to the garage, there to shed his make-believe flesh. Everyone had seen him as a fatty, so he was free to be himself again. Ephraim was in no such hurry to give up his rôle. He was delighted with the attention he was receiving. His wild costume gave him the courage to behave wildly. He crawled about the bottom of his cage on hands and knees, snarled and showed his strong white teeth in a pretended fierceness. He growled blub, blub, ub, gub, gagl, nagl, wagl and other savage utterances which he made up himself. Before the performance Dick had showed Epho off to those who came to see the wild man. Dick had fastened the cage door with a large old-fashioned padlock which his father had donated for the good of the circus. He would open the door of the cage and thrust his

arm inside. Epho would snarl and grab for the arm. Dick would then snatch it away, slam the door shut and snap the padlock.

When his duties as ringmaster called him to the ring, Dick went out of the tent leaving Epho securely locked in the cage. Epho made no objection to this, even when Nelson left the tent. When the show was over more people would come to see him, was the little brown boy's contented thought. He heard the Flanagans' songs and the music pleased him. Once or twice, when he heard loud laughter, he wondered what was so funny. He liked the phonograph tunes, too. He sat and kept time to them with his head and hands.

After a while he did not hear so much laughing, though there was still the busy hum of voices. Then the phonograph stopped playing. Ephraim got ready to play Epho again. He growled softly to himself as he practiced making faces. Still no one came. Where were Dick and Jimmy and John? They ought to come to him soon. He stopped growling and listened. The buzz of voices he had heard now sounded far away. No one wanted to see the wild man.

"Hi, you Dick; hi yi!" He raised his voice

in a worried call. "You done come lemme outa here. No more folks comin' to see me, Ah reckon."

Ephraim waited, expecting Dick would come at once and release him. Dick did not appear, nor did any of the other boys. At that moment they were busy helping the caterer serve the ice-cream.

"Hi, you Jimmy an' John—where is you all? You knows Ah cain't get out. Yi, yi, you come 'long open the doah! You hear me? Ah don' wanta be no wil' man. Ah ain't gwine to be it no more." Ephraim beat the wooden bars of his cage so desperately he almost tipped the cage over.

Up on the lawn Jimmy thought he heard someone calling him. Then he thought he must have been mistaken. He went on serenely carrying plates of ice-cream to the guests on the lawn and veranda while poor imprisoned Ephraim kept up a flow of bitter complaint.

"Ah's gwine yell 'n' holler 'n' purty near bust mah neck, but Ah's gwine make that Dick 'n' Jimmy 'n' John know where Ah is. Ah ain't gwine to be no wil' man, nevah no more. That's what Ah a-i-n-t! A-h-h-h-h-h a-a-i-i-n-n-n-t."



Ephraim began to sob. Gradually his grieving voice rose to a yell. "You l-e-m-m-e—o-ut, you Di-c-c-k!" He gave a long, shrill, piercing scream of indignant despair.

Help was on the way, however, before that piercing scream rent the peaceful air. Celia had finished the washing, had been treated to ice-cream and cake and was ready to go home. She was now out on the lawn hunting for Ephie. As she did not find him she finally stopped Dick on his hurried way across the lawn to ask where her son was.

"Ephie?" Dick cast a quick glance over the lawn, his eyes roving among the groups of children. He did not see Ephie's shining brown face. "Why, let me see, Ephie is ——" Dick gave a sudden gasp of dismay. "Why, Celia, he is—I'll go and get him for you, Celia." He did not stop to say more. He bolted for the tent. He was just raising the flap to enter when Ephie's high, frantic shriek cut the air.

Celia heard it, too, and started after Dick in a hurry.

"Gracious, Ephie, I forgot all about you." Dick bounded into the tent. "Why, it's *too* bad you were shut up in the cage while we were

having a good time. I'm awful sorry." Dick jerked the padlock key from his knickers pocket and hastily unlocked the door.

"Huh, Ah jes' guess's too bad," gurgled Ephraim, dashing a brown arm across his wet eyes. "You done say all the folks comin' back t' see me, an' nobody comin' 'round heah 'tall; jes' nobody; not a sin'l pusson." Ephie lost no time in wriggling through the narrow door to freedom. He stood up straight and gave himself a little shake just as Celia poked her head into the tent opening.

"For the good lan's sake!" She threw up her hands in horrified amazement. "What you doin' like that, chile? Whey's you clothes? Who done stripe you all up like a barber pole?"

"Ephie's a wild man, Celia," Dick explained. "He was a great feature in our circus. We made forty-nine cents from the side-show 'cause he was in it."

"Ah ain't s'prised. Ephie am an awful-lookin' scarecrow in that rig-out." Celia looked severe for a moment, then she burst into a cackle of laughter. "Ephie, you am a funny-'pearin' bird," she said. "Ah done guess you done that to Ephie, you Dick. Ah done wash at you house

long 'nuf t' know you cain't keep way from mischief."

"He's only marked with chalk, Celia." Dick showed his dimples in a wide grin. "You go and sit in the big rocker on the back porch. I'll take care of Ephie. I'll get Jimmy to help me and we'll fix him up fine in just a little while. He hasn't had any cakes and cream yet, so you'll want to wait until he's had some."

"Ah might's well." Celia sighed resignedly and the three started for the back porch. Only a few boys who had straggled to the side yard were privileged to obtain a last look at "Epho, the Fierce Black Wild Man" as he trotted across the back yard escorted by Dick and his mother. Dick ran him into the kitchen and raced out after Jimmy.

Together the two showmen tackled the job of restoring Ephie. They energetically scrubbed him clean of his many-hued stripes, triangles and circles, helped him out of the canvas sack and back to his blue cotton blouse and knee trousers.

"There, Celia, he looks as good as ever, doesn't he?" Dick proudly paraded a now civilized Ephie out to where his mother sat rocking and talking to Netta. She had brought Ephraim a



saucer heaped high with chocolate and strawberry ice-cream and a plate of cakes and set them on a small table in readiness for him.

“ Ah reckon he’s mah li’l boy Ephie, this time.” Celia beamed good-naturedly on her clean brown son. Ephie had seated himself on the top step of the porch, the plate of cream now carefully balanced on his knees, the cake plate beside him.

“ Ah jes’ guess Ah is,” giggled Ephraim. His troubles were past. He could now afford to laugh. “ But Ah’s gwine tell you right now, Mammy, I jes’ guess Ah wuz a purty good li’l wil’ man; *that’s* what *Ah* wuz.”

## CHAPTER XIX

### AFTER THE SHOW

"SAY," began Jimmy as he and Dick left Ephie to enjoy himself, "we ought to try to show Mr. Burton how much we thank him for the surprise. Why, the circus turned into a regular picnic."

"Let's give him a big hurrahing," was Dick's instant suggestion. "He's sitting on the veranda, right near the east corner of it. We can slide up and give him a loud send-off, just like that." Dick struck his hands lightly together. "We'll get the gang together, just the Winners, I mean."

"Oh, fine," breathed Jimmy. "Let's hurry, or he may go home before we get the kids together. You go one way, and I'll go the other. Bring the fellows you find right to the east corner of the house."

Jimmy was off in one direction, Dick in

another, as the words left his lips. Within ten minutes they had gathered up the team and the nine youngsters were grouped at the east corner of the house, heads together, fixing up their "send-off."

"Now remember," said Jimmy softly, "we're to say, 'Mr. Burton, Mr. Burton, Mr. Burton,' then, 'hurrah for Mr. Burton,' three times. After that, 'hurrah,' nine times. Then begin at the first and do it straight over again. You start it, Nelson. You can yell the loudest. Be all ready to join in with Nelson, boys."

"I'll wave my arm like this when I'm ready to yell." Nelson made a pass in the air.

The group of boys drew together and gleefully awaited the signal. Up on the veranda Mr. Burton was enjoying himself heartily in the company of Mr. and Mrs. Hopkins, Dick's mother and a few other pleasant Lakeview persons.

"What's this? What's this?" he repeated as the complimentary salute to himself rose from nine willing throats. The big man's face turned red with embarrassment. He did not know what to say. It embarrassed him still more to have the grown-ups on the veranda join in. The children



on the lawn took up the hurrahing next and the grounds rang with cheers.

“Come around here, you youngsters, and let me have a look at you,” he called out, after the hurrahing had died down.

A cluster of laughing faces appeared around the corner of the house, then the Winners swarmed the steps and stood in a smiling group before Mr. Burton. “What do you mean by stirring up such a pow-wow?” he asked with pretended severity.

“That’s a thank-you pow-wow,” John told him, which made everyone near by laugh. “We wanted you to know how we felt about your surprise.”

“Oh, that was nothing,” Mr. Burton declared, holding up a deprecating hand. “I had *lots* more than three cents’ worth of fun from the circus. Who were those nice children who sang Irish songs? I looked for them after the performance, but I didn’t see them. My mother was born in Ireland, boys, and she used to sing the old Irish songs. I want to hear those children sing again some day. Tell them I said so, will you?”

The busy showmen had forgotten about the Flanagans after they had been given the surprise.

Dick offered to go and hunt them. He did not find them. The Five Flanagans had disappeared.

"I hope they had some ice-cream," was Dick's hospitable wish. "They live quite a way from here, so I guess they had to start home early."

"Well, I'll not forget them. They sang like true Irishmen," Mr. Burton said.

It was almost six o'clock before he and his two companions, Alfred Harding and Robert West, went home. The rest of the crowd had already gone. The showmen, all but Dick, had to go home to their dinners. Dick had coaxed his mother to let him stay to dinner at Happy House so that he could help John and Jimmy clear up the lawn before dark, the next day being Sunday.

Ephraim had not been the only one left in captivity when the crowd and the showmen had deserted the circus lot for the lawn and veranda. Taffy, the raccoon, the parrot and Bolivar still remained behind. The door of Taffy's cage had a wobbling button. Taffy had reached a paw through the bars during the show and frequently batted it. He finally succeeded in opening the door, and out he walked.

The raccoon and the parrot had no such good

luck. Bolivar met with good fortune. Several boys opened the door of his crate and poked him gently with sticks. They liked to see him run out his head. They went away after a time leaving the door open. It did not take Bolivar long to find this out. About the time the crowd was eating ice-cream, Bolivar was leaving the tent behind him for freedom. He crawled across the grass and in the direction of the gardens. Once more he had started on his travels.

When Merritt came for the coon and Nelson for the parrot, Bolivar's escape was discovered.

"We'll *have* to find him before it gets dark," Jimmy said in a positive tone. "He'll travel all night and be far away from here to-morrow."

"We'll each go in a different direction and look for him," proposed Dick. "Junie can go look for him in the back yard. That'll help some."

After fifteen minutes' vain search Dick and Jimmy met at the front steps.

"Do you suppose he went outside the fence?" Dick asked anxiously.

"Maybe he did. That's where he came from in the first place. I'd just like to know how he got that door open. I guess some of the boys



let him out. He's John's turtle, you know. John likes him a lot."

Junior walked up and down his territory a few times calling, "Here, Bulvider; come, Bulvider!" He poked under a few bushes with a stick, but soon grew tired of his job and wandered off to the chicken yard to see how Doodle was after his scare.

John, Jimmy and Dick kept up the hunt until Mrs. Hopkins called them to dinner. It was Netta who found Bolivar, or rather Bolivar almost found Netta. She stepped into the yard to bring in the last of the wash and stumbled squarely over Bolivar. He snapped at her ankle, but missed it. She gave a startled jump and exclaimed: "Whu-u-u!" When she found what she had stumbled over she laughed. "So it's out yez are, ye riptil," she said. "I'll soon be putting a stop to yer fun."

Just then John came around a corner and she turned Bolivar over to his delighted keeping. He set up a shout of "Bolly's found; Bolly's found," which soon brought Dick and Jimmy to the scene.

"You old rascal!" Jimmy exclaimed. "I'll shovel you up in a hurry. You going to be

dumped into your rain barrel house again, and I'll fix it so you can't get out. Go and tell Mother we'll be in to dinner as soon as we shut Bolly up in his house."

While Dick and Jimmy were "shoveling up" Bolivar, Jimmy said rather soberly to Dick, "Say, Dick, you know that forty-nine cents we got for Ephie, for being the wild man? Well, I think we ought to give it to him. He never has any money to spend. His mother's poor and has to work hard, and his father's dead."

"Well, I'd like to give it to him," Dick replied warmly, "but we'd better ask the fellows what they want to do. Nelson was in the side-show, too."

"He wouldn't want any money." Jimmy shook his head. "I *know* he wouldn't. Let's call the boys up after dinner and ask 'em to meet us at the cave on Monday afternoon. We need to have a meeting. We took in pretty nearly six dollars, counting the lemonade. Some people paid nickels and even dimes, and wouldn't take any change back."

"*Pretty nearly six dollars!*" Dick repeated. "Whew! that's fine! What'll we do with it?"

"Oh, I don't know. We'll have to see what

the fellows say. We don't need it ourselves. All of us have most everything we want. I liked the circus for the fun of having it. I didn't care about the money; neither did you, or John."

"That's so." Dick looked wise for a moment. "Why don't we give it *all* to Ephie?" was his inspiration. "I guess he deserves it. That was quite a hard job, being a wild man."

"Yes, and he wasn't mad at us for going away and forgetting him, either," Jimmy reminded. "I'd like to give him the money. I think John would, too."

"We'll meet at the cave Monday. If the rest of the fellows say 'yes,' we'll take the money to Ephie's house. I guess that'll be about the biggest surprise Ephie ever had. He'll be *glad* he was the wild man, even if he did get locked up."



## CHAPTER XX

### A PRESENT FOR EPHIE

THE three showmen managed, in spite of the time lost in hunting Bolivar, to clear up the lawn fairly well before dark. Next day was Sunday and they took a well-earned rest. Even restless Dick told his mother that he was "kind of tired" and she replied that she was not surprised.

It was Mr. Hopkins' last day at home until some time in late October, and the three Js hovered devotedly around him all day. In the afternoon he took Mrs. Hopkins and the boys for a long drive. They stopped and had dinner at "Woodland Inn," a charming restaurant several miles north of Lakeview, and drove home in the early dusk for one more cozy evening with Father at Happy House.

"It's going to be a big long while before Daddy's home again," John said gloomily to Jimmy as the two boys sat staring disconsolately

after the railway taxicab that was just disappearing from their view. It was only a little past six o'clock on Monday morning. Mr. Hopkins had found it necessary to leave Lakeview on an early train, so he had ordered a taxicab from the station. The three Js had been up since five o'clock. They had eaten breakfast with Daddy and seen him off. Now John and Jimmy felt as though the world had suddenly stopped moving.

"Summer'll all be over when he comes back," returned Jimmy. "It will be too late for us to have another picnic at the lake, but maybe we can go to the woods for nuts. Dick says there are lots of chestnuts and butternuts in the Lakeview woods in the fall."

"Then we'll have a campfire and cook our meals over it and all that," planned John. "We'll think up plenty of good times and surprises for Daddy, so we can have them when he comes home again. My, but didn't we have loads of fun last week? We were on the go every minute."

"There isn't much to do this week. We're going to the cave this afternoon. That's one thing we're going to do. If we give the money to Ephie that'll be a little bit more fun. Oh, I forgot our game with the A boys on Thursday.

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I guess we'll find enough things to do." Jimmy brightened as he mentioned the coming game.

"Yes, and next week's the beginning of school." John looked rueful. "We'll have enough to do after school begins. Only, we'll have fun, too, for we know most of the boys. When we came to Lakeview we thought we wouldn't know any of 'em until fall."

"And now we belong to a team, and are friends with a good many Lakeview fellows. I'm glad we met Dick first of all. *He's* the dandiest chum in the whole world," Jimmy added.

"The dandiest chum in the whole world" was having some trouble trying to convince his father that it would be necessary for him to go to Happy House that afternoon. Mr. Carter had suggested that Dick might stay at home once in a while and get acquainted with his own family.

Dick won his point, however, and at two o'clock the Winners were all in the cave, munching huge round sugar cookies and waiting to hear what wonderful thing Dick had to tell them.

"There are five dollars and eighty-nine cents in this box," Dick began, holding up a small, square pasteboard box for the boys to see.



"That's what we made from the circus. We made forty-nine cents from the side-show. Lots of folks gave us more than three cents to get in, you see. Jimmy and I said we thought we ought to give Ephie the forty-nine cents. When we thought about it some more it seemed as if we ought to give him all we made. We thought we'd see what you fellows wanted to do."

"We don't want to give Ephie the money unless every one of you says 'yes' and feel that way about it," Jimmy broke in. "If we divide it among us, we'll each have about sixty-five cents. We don't any of us need that."

"We might keep the money and make some more some day. Still, I guess Ephie would like to have it more'n we would," observed Merritt. "Our folks let us have most everything we want."

The Winners talked the plan over only a minute or two. They were more pleased with the idea of going to Ephie's house and presenting him with the money than they would have been to keep it for themselves. It would be fun to surprise the little brown boy.

Ephie and his mother lived in a three-roomed cottage not far from Nelson White's home. Ned Blake felt very proud because Jimmy asked

him to be the one to present Ephie with the box. Jimmy always tried to give all his chums an equal share in things.

When they reached the little dingy cottage they saw Ephie sitting on the low doorstep busily making spool work. He looked up in round-eyed surprise when he saw the circusmen. "Hillo, thar, you boys!" he cried, showing every tooth in his head. "Ah guess mebbe you wants me fer that ole wil' man again. Heh? You gwine have 'nother cercus?"

"Nope, Ephie," Dick grinned amiably at Ephraim, "no more circus for a while. We came to bring you something. Go ahead, Ned."

Ned stepped forward and laid the pasteboard box on Ephie's knees. "Here, Ephie," he said, "here's all the money we made from the circus. We want you to have it. You were a dandy wild man." Ned ran suddenly out of words. "I—that's about all I can think of to say. Oh, yes; I know. Come on, kids—three cheers for Epho, the Fierce Black Wild Man."

The three cheers were raised with a will. Ephie clutched the box in his brown hands and looked dazed. "You all jes' foolin', Ah reckon." He glanced from one to another of the boys.

"You don't *gimme* this yeah money *fer good*. Purty soon you come take it 'way ag'in."

"No, Ephie, it's yours for good," Jimmy told him.

The Winners had to keep on telling him this pleasant news until it fully dawned upon him that he had come into a small fortune.

"Oh, ki, yi; ki yi!" He jumped up from the doorstep with a jolly little shout, shaking the box between his hands. "Ah is rich, Ah is!" He was so carried away by this sudden wealth he forgot all about saying "thank you."

The givers were not looking for thanks. With their usual energy to be on the move again the Winners said good-bye and left Ephie, a good-natured wildly happy little brown boy, to count the riches that were his as a result of being Epho, the fierce black wild man.

When the presentation party reached the Hopkins' gate they couldn't resist going on up to Happy House for a while. It had gradually become a kind of headquarters for the Winners. They all made for the wide shady back porch which was their favorite roosting place. John went to the kitchen and teased Netta to make a pitcher of lemonade. He gathered up enough



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cakes, which had been left from yesterday's spread, to fill a plate. The boys soon emptied the plate.

"Happy House is the house where something nice or funny is always happening," John said to Jimmy, when, later, the two boys had said good-bye to their chums and were idly lounging in the porch swing on the front veranda.

Just as John said this Junior came into sight. He was wearing the red silk hat and dragging the green umbrella behind him. Tip was prancing along beside him, making frisky little leaps at the moving umbrella.

"He, he," giggled John, "didn't I tell you something funny was always happening at Happy House? What are you going to do with that umbrella, Junie? That's Dick's."

"It are my 'brelly, Johnny. Dick gived it to me," Junior corrected. "It are my hat, too. Dick said so."

"Well, don't you lose 'em," counseled John. "We'll need 'em if we have another circus next summer."

"It's an awful long time till next summer," Jimmy said reflectively.

"Yes, but we've so many things to do this fall

we won't be thinking much about that," John returned cheerily. "We'll have some ball games yet, even after school begins. Then there's Hallowe'en coming and Thanksgiving. First thing we know it'll be winter, and then Christmas."

"Our first Christmas at Happy House'll be a good, jolly one. It'll be a happy Christmas at Happy House. We'll ask Mother to let us have a great big tree and a Christmas party, and a sleigh ride in a big bob sled like the one in Nelson's father's barn." Jimmy warmed to the delightful subject.

"Yes, and we'll go around in it on Christmas eve and sing carols," put in John eagerly. "We'll dress Junie up like a Santa Claus and take him with us. He can stop and leave pretty Christmas cards at the different houses we go to. We'll do a lot more nice things, only I can't think of 'em all just now."

Jimmy and John were already planning their jolly winter fun.

The titles in the Happy House Books are :

JIMMY JOHN AND JUNIOR

JIMMY AT HAPPY HOUSE

JOHN AND THE WINNERS' CLUB (in press)

















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